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HINTS AND HELPS

ON THE

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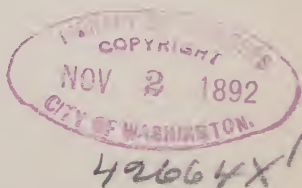
FOR 1893.

BY

REV. DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D. D.,

AND

REV. JOSEPH DUNN BURRELL.



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HINTS AND HELPS.

RETURNING FROM THE CAPTIVITY.

EZRA I: I-II.

GOD rules. His throne is at the centre of history. His sovereignty is the key of all the mysteries in providence and grace. For what is love worth, or justice either, unless there is power behind it? Whether at Sinai or at Calvary the manifesto is the same: "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

Our world was not moulded in the Creator's hands, invested with laws and then flung out into space. It is under his eyes continually. He cares for the lilies of the field more assiduously than a farmer's wife for the poppies and carnations before her door. He guides the stars in their courses, the sparrows in their flight. Kings deliberating on vast policies and children lost and frightened in the shadowy woods are alike under his protection. He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say unto him, What doest thou?

Oh, blessed Providence! We, the immortals, are not like tufts of cotton seized in the teeth of insensate Law as of an irresistible machine to be torn asunder and twisted together—the helpless prey of rods and whirling wheels—to be lost and forgotten in the beauty of an ultimate fabric. We are not victims of fate. We are God's children;

the world is his nursery, his school-room, his 'prentice shop; he oversees, he corrects and enheartens, he cares for all.

We look behind and speak of History; before, and speak of Prophecy; but he looks neither behind nor before. Yesterday and to-morrow are alike to him. One glance sweeps the whole horizon. Does it seem wonderful that Cyrus should have been called and commissioned by name two centuries before his birth? We forget that telling and foretelling are the same with God. The map of eternity and the universe has always been spread out before him. In our cursory survey of his dealings with his chosen people we shall perceive, over and over, how he hath known the end from the beginning. We shall see them dragged from their homes to receive chastisement in the weary bondage of a distant land. We shall see them kept for a man's lifetime as separate from their surroundings as the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic. We shall see them delivered by an interposition of Providence as marvellous as the rod that once before had opened for them a highway through the waters of the sea. We shall hear them singing on their homeward journey, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." (Psa. 126: 3.)

First, the Captivity. It was in the year 604 B. C. that Nebuchadnezzar reduced Jerusalem and returned with his first deportation of captives. The date is important because it furnishes the prime factor in all calculations respecting the deliverance from Babylon. The captivity was for an appointed time, seventy years. There was a special reason why it should be precisely seventy years. The Lord had required of Israel the observance of every seventh year as a season of Sabbatic rest; for a period of four hundred and ninety years this injunction had been

practically ignored. Seventy Sabbatic years have been desecrated; seventy years of Babylonish chastisement shall expiate the sin. So true is retribution; so precisely is the sentence adjusted to the fault. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

But the captivity was not mere retribution; it was discipline. Its purpose was not so much to punish as to reform. The chosen people had in them great possibilities, but they were wayward and stiff-necked. Had they been no more to God than the Amorites and the Perizzites he might have suffered them to gang their ain gait; but whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. These were a chosen people, bearing as it were a filial relation with God. The children's portion is theirs. So it is written, "If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Heb. 12:6-11).

The Jews had a mission. God had called them from among the nations to take charge of his oracles. The world was lapsing into idolatry; monotheism must be kept and handed down until Christ shall usher in the New Economy. For this function Abram was chosen and called out of Ur of the Chaldees. To him and his children was committed the true religion, which they were solemnly enjoined to keep pure and undefiled for the coming ages. But this people, however superior to other tribes and nations in many particulars, had not been loyal to its trust. It had forgotten Jehovah and his laws, had neglected his sanctuary and profaned his Sabbaths. It needed chastening. God as a wise Father had no alternative but to inflict it. Hence the captivity. Nor was the discipline in vain. God's people were duly exercised

thereby. It will be profitable to note some of the lessons which they learned during these seventy years.

(1) They were cured of idolatry. They had previously been unable to resist the imposing rites and ceremonies of their pagan neighbors. But their familiarity with the abominations of the Babylonish gods had nauseated them. They longed for God, for the living God, saying, "When shall we return and appear before God?"

(2) They conceived a new devotion to the Lord's sanctuary. Its holy observances had once been a weariness to their flesh; but now they were homesick for Zion. The institution of the Synagogue is traced to this period. The captives hanged their harps on the willows, and wept when they remembered Zion. Oh, to hear again the sound of the silver trumpet, the voice of the Levite, the antiphonal anthem, "Praise the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever!"

(3) They learned the value of the Scriptures. "Blessings brighten as they take their flight." It was long since they had seen the minister take the scroll from the sacred chest. To hear it read again would be like a draught of water on a desert journey. One there was indeed among the captives who had devoted himself to the task of collecting and preserving all scraps and fragments of Holy Writ. A company of kindred spirits, calling themselves "scribes," were gathered about him. It is related that this man, Ezra, and his co-laborers in "the Great Synagogue," after the return from the Captivity, perfected the Old Testament canon. Certain it is that a great revival occurred in the study of the Scriptures (see Neh. 8).

(4) The stock of Israel was culled and greatly improved during this period of chastisement. And it was

only the choicest and best that joined in the Restoration. In the caravans that successively returned to Jerusalem were "the noblest of the Jewish race, the flower of the princes, patricians, and priests of Judah, of its skilled mechanics and once successful burgesses." Thus the colonists who gave themselves to the rebuilding of the walls of the Holy City and its sanctuary were far better qualified than the original body of the people to fulfil the important mission which had been laid upon them.

(5) The Israelites were greatly knit together during the Captivity. They learned to share each other's woes, to bear each other's burdens. Their tears were mingled in remembering the pleasant days of lang syne, and they enheartened each other with hopes that were shadowed forth in prophecy. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." A common sorrow will erase the enmity of years. Pain is a mighty solvent. The Jews of to-day scattered abroad over the earth are a living witness to the unifying power of adversity. Their first experience of it as a nation was in Babylon. In their trials there they felt the need of fellowship; they crowded close; they felt the beating of each other's hearts; they held each other up.

(6) The heart and intellect of the nation were broadened by their stay in Babylon. As a man's ways of thinking are modified by travel—his charities enlarged, his prejudices dissipated, and his patriotic impulses quickened—so these people who had dwelt in a narrow strip of country shut off from the world by the desert, the Mediterranean, and the crags of Moab, were required by their contact with strange modes and customs to abandon many of their provincial notions and readjust their policies to the fact that the world was greater than they had sup-

posed. And this widening of vision is manifest in all their subsequent history. They were thenceforth cosmopolitan, no longer dwellers in a far corner of the earth.

Thus it appears the Captivity was no mere happening; it was an essential part of the divine plan with respect to the chosen people. It was intended for their good; and the outcome shows the far-seeing wisdom of the gracious Father who planned it, and who used his enemies as pliant instruments in the accomplishment of it. Now

II. *As to the Proclamation of Cyrus.* This also was in pursuance of the divine plan. The clock struck at precisely the right moment. Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 B. C. The proclamation was issued 536 B. C., leaving time for the beginning of the second temple in May of the year 534 B. C. The intervening period was *just seventy years*. God does all things in fullness of time; nothing is premature, nothing too late.

It is worth repeating that this Proclamation had been predicted nearly two centuries before its issuance. The very name of its author was given: "Thus saith the Lord, I am he that stretcheth forth the heavens and spreadeth abroad the earth; I am he that turneth wise men backward and maketh their knowledge foolishness; I am he that confirmeth the word of his servant and performeth the counsel of his messenger; I am he that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited, and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built; I am he that saith to Cyrus, He is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." (Isa. 44:24-28.) These words were uttered when as yet Jerusalem was standing and its temple was resonant with the praises of

God. How remote the contingency referred to! And when that prophecy was afterwards read by the captives in far-away Babylon how improbable its fulfilment must have seemed! Cyrus, surnamed "the Great," was the last of sovereigns from whom to expect an act of homage to Israel's God. But the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will. (Prov. 21:1.)

It is recorded that "Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, the king of Persia, to make this proclamation throughout all his kingdom." How did the Lord stir up his heart? (1) Doubtless he spoke to him by the voice of his Spirit in the inner man. We are all thus directed at times: if we grieve not the Spirit we shall be ever guided in this way. (2) Probably Daniel, who occupied at this time a place of honor and responsibility at the Persian court, brought the matter to the king's attention. He may have read to him the prophecy of Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord, After seventy years are accomplished at Babylon I will visit you and perform my good word towards you in making you return to your city" (Jer. 29:10); and the prophecies of Isaiah in which he was exhorted by name to break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron. (Isa. 44:24-28; also 45:1-4.) The thought that he was thus singled out for honor and responsibility may have stimulated him to the noble deed. (3) It may have shaped itself in his mind as a suggestion of policy. He was at this time aiming at Universal Empire. A friendly ally on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean might be an important factor in the furtherance of his plans. (4) Or possibly there was a religious motive. He was a monotheist. He may have received the message and commission from Jehovah as

from his own Ormuzd; and thus, as one bewildered among names and groping in the dark, may have rendered an act of obedience to the one true God.

III. *The return to Jerusalem.* "Then rose of the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, with all whose spirit was quickened, to go up and build the house of the Lord."

It was a voluntary movement. No one was compelled to go. All were encouraged. Such as were too poor to go were "strengthened with vessels of silver and gold, with goods, with beasts of burden, and with precious things." The king himself greatly aided the enterprise by restoring to the pilgrims the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from the temple in Jerusalem. So they set forth—not unmindful of the difficulties of the journey, but prayerful and hopeful. There were 50,000 in all. Zerubbabel with ten elders led the way. There were 8,000 camels for burden-bearing. They were four months on the journey.

In the 126th Psalm we have one of the songs of this pilgrimage: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream; then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing!"

The tribes of the wilderness had heard their fathers tell how, almost a century before, bands of captains had been carried past, in chains and weeping, towards the East. Could these be the children of those same bondmen—these who journeyed with glad steps and in their bivouacs awoke the echoes of the distant hills with their rejoicing? "Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them!"

But, alas, there were captives still in Babylon! Bound by ties of long association, they preferred to remain where

they were rather than flee to dangers that they knew not of. It was a long journey; and at the journey's end a ruined city and a desolated shrine. Was it worth while? "Nay," said they, "Babylon is better." But as the pilgrims journeyed they were mindful of those who thus tarried in the land of bondage. Prayers ascended for them from every tent at eventide: "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South—as the rivers of Negeb swollen by the latter rains!"

God is the hearer of prayer. Tears tell; and no suppliant crieth in vain. Not a few of the laggards were moved to return. Many who said farewell by the banks of the Euphrates clasped hands again beneath the rising walls of Jerusalem. Pray on, O Christian, for thy friends who are still in bondage. Prayer fills a brazen sky with promises of rain. Prayer melts the snows of Hermon. Prayer swells the brooks of promise to mountain torrents of blessing. Pray on! Pray for friends and neighbors; pray for such as are wasting their substance in the far country; pray for the nations that lie in darkness and the shadow of death. God hears. He will turn again our captivity, again and again, until Babylon is a desolation and Jerusalem resounds with song. For it shall come to pass in the last days, saith the Lord, that my house shall be established in the top of the mountains and all the nations shall flow unto it. (Isa. 2:2.)

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE.

EZRA 3:1-13.

THE journey was over. Four months the great caravan—50,000 of the flower of Israel—had toiled along the desert wastes and mountain paths. Band by band they had climbed the last heights of Moab and emerged in sight of Zion; a little further and they camped amid the sacred ruins. There were those among them who could remember the former magnificence: homes and palaces jostling each other—for Jerusalem had been “builted as a city compact together”—streets echoing with the confused noise of many industries, gateways thronged with chaffering merchants, the slopes of the surrounding hills carpeted with yellow fields and vineyards, beasts of burden defiling along the mountain roads—a picture of surpassing beauty and prosperity—and in the midst of all, the towering splendors of Solomon’s temple, “exceeding magnifical.” But what a change! Where were now the marble walls, the gilded domes and columns? Where were the prosperous merchants, the camel-drivers, the Tyrian fish-peddlers? How dreary the desolation! How oppressive the silence! From rubbish heaps on every side the owl and bittern derided the days of old. The glory had departed.

But these returning exiles were not the men to give themselves to lamentation or fruitless reminiscence. They were picked men: volunteers; chosen of God to rebuild the waste places. They had not ventured upon this enterprise without a clear understanding of the difficulties in the way. They were animated by patriotic and religious

motives of the noblest character. They felt themselves to be consecrated and commissioned servants of the living God.

In the seventh month—the most sacred of the Jewish calendar—there was a great rally. “The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.” They were about to undertake the restoration of their ancestral *cultus*. Who could tell what important and far-reaching issues were to flow from the proceedings of that day? There was no misgiving or trepidation; no one held back. They rallied like the disciples of Christ at Pentecost, “all with one accord in one place.”

I. *The first thing they did was to rebuild the altar.* This was a right beginning. The altar of sacrifice was the centre of the Jewish religion, just as its antitype, the cross, is the centre of Christianity. The temple, important as it was every way, could wait; but the fire must be kindled on the altar at the very outset. Thus a man may be a very excellent Christian, though ignorant of the doctrines of systematic theology and the conventionalities of worship, if only he is a reverent believer in Christ and him crucified. The cross is the great saving truth. The cross is our altar, it stands at the centre of our religion and casts its luminous shadow in all directions to the uttermost parts of the earth.

(1) The altar of burnt-offering, in this instance was intended as a safeguard. The people made haste concerning it because “fear was upon them.” They were surrounded by tribes of the desert and mountain whom they had reason to regard as hereditary foes. The ordinary course to pursue under such circumstances was to build fortifications; but these people were under divine protection. One of their songs ran in this wise, “We have

a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks" (Isa. 26: 1); and again, "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation and thy gates Praise" (Isa. 60: 18). There is no hiding-place like the divine love; no security like that which a timid soul finds under the shadow of the altar (Psa. 84: 3). "The right of sanctuary" has been associated with God's house from time immemorial. To this day there is a charmed spot within the precincts of the ruined Abbey of Holyrood, at Edinburgh, where debtors are free from molestation. A man is never, never so safe from the adverse influences of this and the invisible world as when upon his knees.

(2) This altar, furthermore, is said to have been "set upon its bases;" that is, it was restored upon its former foundations. The rubbish was cleared away and the old bases were found; and these people knelt at the altar in the very place where their fathers had knelt before them. There is virtue in observing the old landmarks. In these days when new departures are in the air, new theologies and revisions of old symbols, it may not be unprofitable to ponder on the fact that some things never grow obsolete. Air and water and sunlight are just what they were when Abram pitched his tent by the great river; nor is human ingenuity likely to improve them in any way. There are some truths which bear to our spiritual constitutions the same relation as light does to the eyes and water to the lungs. Nothing can change them, nothing amend or improve them. There may be new formulations, new modes of presentation; but the altar of the Christian religion will stand on its old bases as long as time endures. And the altar itself is not left to our devising; it must be built after the pattern shown in the mount. A new fire must be kindled upon it, new sacrifices

made continually, and new prayers offered around it; but the truth, however presented, must stand upon the Rock of Ages. This never shifts, is never disturbed by the *zeitgeist*; it is, like God himself, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever.

(3) It will be observed, also, that the ceremonies of this restored altar were conducted after the prescribed form. The importance of haste was not permitted to mar the order of the proceedings. Joshua the high-priest took the lead; and Zerubbabel, of the line royal, assisted him. Church and state coöperated, as they should ever do, being coördinate powers, alike ordained of God. And the sacrifices were laid upon the altar "by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required." If ever there was occasion for the waiving of formalities it was here; yet everything was done in due order. Here is a lesson for all haste-makers—for men who under extraordinary pressure of business excuse themselves from the morning hour at the family altar. There is great reward in scrupulosity. Let all things be done decently and in order. He that believeth shall not make haste.

II. *The next thing the Israelites did*, after having restored the altar, *was to prepare for the rebuilding of their temple*. We are at every point impressed with the deliberateness of these people. There was no fretting or worrying; no premature planning and proclaiming. They knew that years of labor were before them; and many important things must be done before it could be undertaken. "The foundation was not yet laid." There were heaps of rubbish to be cleared away; ways and means to be considered; materials collected; skilled workmen secured; and the whole work must be organized and placed in competent hands. But they could

afford to be deliberate so long as they knew that God was with them, overseeing and directing them.

(1) The altar, meanwhile, was kept in constant use. Its fires never went out. There was no lack of offerings upon it. The people had learned by sad experience their dependence on God. This enterprise would prove a failure to a certainty unless he furthered it, "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain."

(2) There was but little difficulty in collecting the necessary funds. The people had come full-handed from the land of their captivity. The tithes of the first harvest were enlarged by propitious suns and gracious rains. Free-will offerings poured in, each man giving as the Lord had prospered him. It is written, "They gave unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold and five thousand pounds of silver" (Ezra 2:69). This was about \$500,000; or an amount equal to ten dollars for every soul—large giving when contrasted with the ten cents *per capita* which Christians are said to be giving on the average each year for the conversion of the world. But these people were in earnest. They meant to build the temple and to dedicate it free from debt. Think of the trouble and scandal that might arise from a mortgage in the hands of some Syrian or Moabitish money-lender! No such mismanagement was dreamed of. The money must be in hand for the whole work before the corner-stone could be laid. And there was no Board of Church Erection to help them out. The money must be forthcoming; and they must give it. So they all gave, men, women, and children. They gave as they prayed. When all believers do the same, the

glory of the Lord will soon cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

(3) We are given to understand that the workmen were secured by generous outlay and paid promptly when the wages fell due. There was to be no builders' lien on the temple. Some of the skilled artisans were from among the neighboring tribes; they should see how God's people held the balances between capital and labor. There must be neither strikes nor lockouts. And, indeed, why should there ever be? The secret of the ultimate settlement of the labor problem lies in the Golden Rule. If the Carpenter of Nazareth could have his way there would be everywhere an honest day's wages for an honest day's work. Walking delegates and Pinkerton's men would go out together; there would be nothing for them to do.

(4) The materials for the temple were collected from every quarter. Tyre and Zidon and the forests of Lebanon were put under contribution. The whole world bestirred itself because the Lord had said, "Build me a house!" Thus he ever utilizes the nations. The Cæsars built highways for the propagation of the gospel. Soulless corporations in our time are binding the far corners of the earth together with iron bands and cables, not knowing nor caring that God's kingdom is thus being ushered in. Arise, O temple of the Lord! Arise, shine; for his glory is risen upon thee! Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about and see; they gather themselves together, they come unto thee! The multitude of camels, the dromedaries of Midian; the flocks of Kedar, the rams of Nebaioth; they all, saith the Lord, shall come with acceptance to mine altar. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the

box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary ; and I will make the place of my feet glorious !”

III. *So they came to the building of the temple.* It was not until Zif—the blossom month—of the second year of their return that the preparations were so far completed as to warrant the laying of the corner-stone. The event occurred on the seventieth anniversary of the destruction of the former temple. It was an occasion of great rejoicing. The priests were there “in their apparel, with trumpets :” and the Levites with cymbals, to praise the Lord after the ordinance of David. The heights of Zion that had slumbered so long awoke to the voice of music. To and fro among the great choirs rose the antiphonal refrain, “Praise the Lord, for he is good ; his mercy endureth for ever !” Those who had no lot nor part in the rejoicing heard it from the surrounding hills and wondered. The air rang with the shrill blast of trumpets, the clang of cymbals and the voices of the multitude ; for “they shouted with a great shout because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.” Never had Zion known such acclamations since the memorable day of the bringing up of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom ; when the king sang “Give unto the Lord, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength !” and all the people shouted, “Amen ; praise ye the Lord !” Verily the old times were come again. But there was also the mingling of a minor strain. Some of the returned exiles were moved to tears at the laying of the foundations. They remembered the glory of the former house, the sweet convocations there, the faces that were gone. Was it strange that they lifted up their voices and wept ? Possibly under these outward tokens of sorrow lay a deeper and more grateful joy than could have found ex-

pression in song and laughter. For if they missed the Ark, the sacred fire and the glittering splendors of the time when silver was as stones in Jerusalem, they had God's promise that greater glories were in store for the new house. The Son of Man himself—of whom the Ark was a faint symbol—would walk in the midst of it; his doctrines would furnish forth a better repast than the table of show-bread; his prayers would rise more acceptably than incense from the golden altar; and the shining of his face would illuminate the sanctuary with a splendor beyond that of the golden candlestick. The lamentations of these elder pilgrims are lost in the blare of trumpets, the clang of cymbals, and the swelling chorus, "Praise the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever!"

A great temple is rising in the earth, without the sound of hammer or of ax, in which all people shall, in the last days, worship God in the beauty of holiness. The foundation has been laid; for "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The builders are at work, each over against his own place in the wall. The highest honor possible to mortal man is to be reckoned among them. No life is so well spent as that which, like the minute architect of the coral reef, leaves itself in the substance of the fabric. Let us lend a hand in service however humble to the upbuilding of the kingdom of truth and righteousness on earth. The work is under way; the walls rise higher with each rising sun; the time draws near when the top-stone of the corner shall be laid with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!"

ENCOURAGING THE PEOPLE.

HAGGAI 2:1-9.

IT was now fourteen years since the returned exiles had laid the corner-stone of the temple with clang of cymbals and multitudinous shouts of thanksgiving. That had been a great and memorable day. What joyous hopes were theirs—what courage and enthusiastic devotion! But alas, a tinder fire soon dies. The temple was still unfinished. Its bare walls stood open to the skies; and winds from the heights of Moab swept through the unlinteled doors, awaking derisive echoes in the great courts that should have been resonant with hallelujahs. The outer precincts were littered with unused stone and lumber; and cedar-rafts were floating moss-covered in the harbor at Joppa, thirty miles away. No sound of ax or trowel disturbed the silence of the sacred enclosure. Owls blinked among its nooks and crannies; foxes from the clefts of Hinnom crept in and out of its Holy of Holies. A ruined church is oftentimes a sad comment on religion; an unfinished church is a sadder one.

Why was it? What had arrested the work that began so auspiciously?

(1) The enthusiasm of the people was but a transient fervor. Too many of our ships are wafted out by favoring gales only to be becalmed upon the open sea. An ounce of resolution goes further in the long run than a ton of impulse. The race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong. The long training of the athlete will go for naught if he neglect to gird up his loins. Steadfastness is a cardinal virtue. The reward is to him

that overcometh; not to the man that putteth on his harness, but to him that putteth it off. These people should have known that temple-building was the work of years of patient continuance. When the songs ceased and the smoke of the holocaust cleared away their ardor cooled.

(2) Then they began to question and calculate: Might it not be that the project was premature? The altar was restored; why could not the temple wait? Thus church committees in our time halt in their enterprise, content to roof over the unfinished spire or to worship in the chapel for a while. In this case, moreover, there was an open question as to the fulness of time. The rebuilding of the temple should mark the completion of the seventy years of chastisement; but from what point should they reckon? From Nebuchadnezzar's victory, the final destruction of the temple, or the last deportation of captives? There were two sides to the question: and some said, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. 1:2).

(3) Meanwhile there was the natural concern as to temporal affairs. For years the land had been untilled: it needed to be cleared of weeds and ploughed and planted. They could not live without harvests. And their homes, too, must be rebuilt; it was not to be expected that they would dwell continuously in tents or among these ruins. Thus one by one the workmen left the temple walls and turned their energy to affairs of more personal moment. Perhaps if they had continued to devote themselves to God's sanctuary he might have devised some plan of providing for their wants. Perhaps! There was no doubt about it. There never is; "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all

these things shall be added unto you." But hard times were pushing these people to the wall. They felt the necessity of looking to their own affairs. The temple could wait; food and raiment do not lay themselves at one's feet; God helps those who help themselves. Thus the workmen laid aside their hammers to follow the plough, and turned from the temple to put a roof over their own heads.

(4) And there were other things that conspired to arrest the work. The adjacent tribes had set themselves against it. The Samaritans, their neighbors on the north—a mongrel people, monotheistic and with a tincture of Jewish blood—had at the first besought the privilege of coöperating with them. The request was promptly refused; in such an enterprise compromise with a semi-pagan people was out of the question. The refusal incensed and embittered them, and thenceforward they bent their utmost energies to hinder the work. "They weakened the hands of the people and troubled them in building." They used their influence against them through hired agents at the Persian court with such effect that a *firman* was at length issued putting a summary injunction on the further restoration of the temple. This order, however, was not issued until some years after the laying of the corner-stone; so that, with proper diligence, the work might have been greatly advanced if not wholly completed before this difficulty arose (see Ezra 4). At this point it will be interesting to note one of the curious instances of the confirmation of Scripture. In Rawlinson's "Ancient Monarchies" we are informed that the *firman* here referred to was not issued by Cyrus nor by his son Cambyses—both of these being Zoroastrians and therefore in some sympathy with the Jews as monothe-

ists—but by the usurper Smerdis, who being a Magian was not unwilling to oppose any people who worshipped a personal God. Not until Darius came to the throne, he also being a Zoroastrian, did the Jews pluck up courage to resume the work.

This occurred in the second year of Darius Hystaspis, 520 B. C., and was brought about largely through the efforts of Haggai and Zechariah, who “prophesied unto the Jews that were in Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel” (Ezra 5:1). The former is known to us only through his connection with this affair. His prophecies are brief and fragmentary, consisting of three addresses all delivered within a period of three months.

I. The first (Haggai 1) was delivered at the feast of the New Moon, on the first day of the sixth month, 520 B. C. On this occasion a sacrifice was offered, the rulers and people being assembled within the neglected precincts of the temple. In the shadow of the unfinished walls, with heaps of unused stone and lumber scattered about, Haggai arose and addressed himself in the name of the Lord to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high-priest. He alluded to the pretext made by some for delaying the work, “The time has not come for the building up of the Lord’s house!” and rebuked it with a scathing reference to their absorption in personal affairs, “Is it time for you to dwell in your ceiled houses and this house lie waste?” He admonished them that self-seeking at the expense of the Lord’s work is a losing venture. Their own prosperity had suffered. Their crops had failed, their savings had dwindled away. “Ye looked for much and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home I breathed upon it and it was gone! Why? saith the Lord. Because ye neglect my house and run every man unto his

own." This was the reason why the dews had failed and the earth was stayed from her fruit, why drought had come upon the fields and failure on all the labor of their hands.

If it seem that Haggai here appealed to a low motive, let it be remembered that the Jews were always sensitive at this point. They had ever an eye to the main chance, and have to this day. The Lord knew how to move their sluggish natures. In three weeks from the time of the prophet's admonition the work upon the temple was again under way. The *firman* of Smerdis was still operative; but Darius the Zoroastrian was now upon the throne, and all fears were quieted by the prophet's assurance, "Thus saith the Lord, I am with you!" (Haggai 1).

Then a new opposition arose. In this instance it came from Tatnai and Shethar-boznai, representatives of the Persian government in the neighboring territory. They demanded of the elders of Israel their authority for proceeding with the work and inquired for names that they might present a formal indictment at the Persian Court. This indictment was met by a counter statement on the part of the elders, who asked for an investigation of the records of Cyrus with respect to the original decree. This brought out the truth of the matter; so that Darius issued an order cancelling the *firman* of the usurper and endorsing the original permission to build. But while this decision was pending the hearts of the workmen were filled with apprehension.

II. Then Haggai delivered his second address; (Haggai 2: 1-9). It was on the twenty-first day of the seventh month of the same year, 520 B. C. This also was at one of the great annual feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles. The builders were discouraged not merely by the opposi-

tion of Tatnai and Shethar-boznai, but by the fact that their resources seemed inadequate to a great enterprise. The old men were continually recalling the splendors of Solomon's temple in contrast with the humble dimensions and adornments of this second house. Was it worth while to spend themselves, in the face of such hindrances, upon a structure of such inferior glory?

"Thus saith the Lord, Be strong, O Zerubbabel, and be strong, O Joshua, and be strong, all ye people of the land—and work! For I am with you." It was the voice of Haggai encouraging the builders. "Thus saith the Lord, I am with you!" What more could they want? The test of loyalty is pursuance of the work. God hath spoken; let that suffice. Storms are naught when he walketh on the waves. Imperial manifestoes are paper pellets when he uttereth his voice. "Be strong, therefore, and work." No fearing, no questioning, no tarrying. On with your work, saith the Lord, for I am with you!

"And the glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former." Yet how could that be? There were those among them who had seen the former house—a forest of beauty, a mountain of treasure; and "was not this in their eyes in comparison as nothing?" Where were the spacious courts and porches? Where were the gilded columns, the resplendent domes, the imposing stairways, the massive doors, the ivory throne, the fine twined curtains, the vestments set with sparkling jewels, the Ark of the Covenant, the tables of stone, the Urim and Thummim, and the shechinah—the luminous cloud of the divine presence? All gone! "Nevertheless," said Haggai, "the glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former." How could that be? (1) To begin with, God would here manifest himself in the outpouring

of his power. Sublime messages of truth, announcements of divine faithfulness in the fulfillment of old-time shadows, flaming prophecies of ultimate glory were to be heard amid these rising walls. (2) But better still Messiah himself was to worship at the altar and walk among these porches. If the light of the golden candlesticks was quenched, what mattered it? The Light of the World was here to shine forth! And who would miss the pillar of cloud, when the God who manifested himself therein should come in flesh and commune with his people face to face and eye to eye? A glad farewell to painted emblems in home or sanctuary when Jesus in person enters at the door! Welcome to the Desire of all Nations! All masterpieces lose their glory in comparison with the beauty of his face. Gold grows dim and diamonds shine no more in the light of his countenance. (3) If God were so minded he might adorn the second temple with wealth incomputable. "The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith the Lord." It would be a little matter for him to compel the hills and the oceans to empty their treasures upon it. But silver and pearls are only dust, shining dust. Truth and righteousness, which endure for ever, shall be for the adorning of his sanctuary. (4) Still further, the latter house was to be beautified with salvation: "for in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." The hands of Jesus were to be lifted there in the benediction, "Peace be unto you!" Many a sinner was to hear, within its sacred confines, the gracious words, "Thy sins be forgiven thee!" In one of its porches a sinful woman was to crouch beneath the scorn of her accusers until he should say, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, sin no more." It was to be as the very palace of Shiloh from which pardons should go forth like doves fluttering from

its windows. It was to be the centre of God's mighty work of grace, to which a multitude of souls would cast a grateful backward look, saying, "Behold, I was born there!"

With such considerations did the prophet encourage the builders. At this juncture also came the decision of Darius with respect to the original decree; it was to the effect that his officers everywhere must keep hands off: "Let God, who hath caused his name to dwell in Jerusalem, destroy all rulers and people who shall hinder the building of his house. I, Darius, have made the decree; let it be done with speed." Thus again, for a season, the work went on with enthusiasm. But new misgivings arose, The winter crops had been sown and needed to be cared for. What was to become of the fields and vineyards if the men were all employed upon the temple? Their granaries were already empty; what would befall them in the event of the failure of another crop?

III. Then came Haggai's third message: (Haggai 2:10-19). He began by admonishing them that sin disqualifies for holy service. A lie, a false measure, the touching of an unclean thing will unfit them to lay a stone in the temple wall. Then he touches upon their sordidness and want of faith. If they attend to the Lord's command he will see that their harvests are cared for. They had already tried the other course; and the work of their hands had been smitten with blasting and with mildew and with hail. Let them now turn and trust him. "Is the seed yet in the barn? saith the Lord. Have not the vine and the fig-tree, the olive and the pomegranate brought forth? Be not anxious, therefore; from this day will I bless you." How hard it is to learn the lesson. Nevertheless it holds true that godliness—obedience, sim-

ple trust—is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come (1 Tim. 4:8).

On the same day when this address was made to the people a special word of encouragement was sent through the prophet to Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:20-23). There were reasons why he, as the civil ruler of Jerusalem and specially accountable to the Persian authorities, should be strengthened from on high. He was accordingly advised that wars were approaching in which the earth-powers were to totter to their fall, "the horses and their riders to be brought down, every one by the sword of his brother." But a promise was given that, amid all this commotion, Zerubbabel was to be divinely cared for. Greater kings would fall, but he—the petty governor of a small province—would have his name inscribed in imperishable records. God would make use of him as a sovereign uses his signet-ring. How his heart must have swelled with grateful pride on hearing these words: "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, and will make thee as a signet; for I have chosen thee!"

The words of Haggai the prophet are ended. His mission, as we have seen, extended over a brief period of only three months. His work was to encourage the builders; and he did it. What more could be asked of any man? God has a commission for every one. To heed and endeavor is to make an assured success of life. This is the very best that can be written of any mortal man, that he had something to do and did it for God.

JOSHUA THE HIGH-PRIEST.

ZECH. 3:1-10.

AT the time when the Israelites had left off the rebuilding of the temple and were going about their personal affairs, two prophets—Haggai and Zechariah—appeared to admonish them. Our acquaintance with the former is limited to three addresses, very brief, and all delivered within the space of a few weeks; but these, at the time, created so profound an impression that it was reported—and has come down in tradition to this day—that Haggai was an angel dwelling among men. His colleague, Zechariah, was younger; less inclined to reproof than to exhortation, and fond of dwelling on the splendid rewards of virtue. His prophecies were delivered in the form of visions. There were nine in all, as follows:

- (1) The Man among the Myrtles; (chap. 1:1-17).
- (2) The four Horns and the four Carpenters;
1:18-21).
- (3) The Man with a Measuring Line; (2:1-13).
- (4) Joshua the High-Priest; (3:1-10).
- (5) The Candlesticks and the Olive trees; (4:1-14).
- (6) The Flying Roll; (5:1-4).
- (7) The Woman in the Ephah; (5:5-11).
- (8) The Four Chariots; (6:1-8).
- (9) The Crowns of Silver and Gold; (6:9-15.)

The fourth of these visions is now to engage our attention. It was intended, like all the others, to encourage the rebuilding of the temple. The high-priest at this time was Joshua. It was his peculiar function to minister

at the altar, not only in behalf of the people, but as their representative. In this capacity he foreshadowed the atoning work of Jesus as the Great High-Priest, taking our place before the offended law. It became him, therefore, to keep himself unspotted from the world. The white garments in which he ministered on the Day of Atonement typified the immaculateness of the ideal Intercessor, who must be "holy, harmless, and undefiled." But Joshua knew that he fell far short; and the people also were not unaware of it. No doubt there were times when his heart was overburdened with a sense of unworthiness and he cried, "Who am I that I should stand before the people or minister at the altar of God!" But the Lord is not a hard taskmaster; he knoweth our flesh; he remembereth that we are dust. It is his delight to strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees. At this very time he sent to Zerubbabel, the civil ruler in Jerusalem, a message by the lips of Haggai for his comfort and encouragement. A corresponding message was now sent to Joshua through Zechariah. The resumption and successful prosecution of the work upon the temple devolved not less upon the ecclesiastical than upon the civil power. Zerubbabel and Joshua must coöperate. The former was ready; the latter needed to be extricated from the Slough of Despond. To this end the fourth vision was given.

I. At the opening of the vision the prophet saw Joshua standing to be judged before the angel of God.

(1) And he was clothed in filthy garments. He was indeed quite unworthy, of himself, to stand even for himself—much more as the representative of the people—before God. The best of humankind is not perfect. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men

to see if there were any that did understand and seek God ; and lo, they are all gone aside, said he ; "there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Adam ate of the forbidden fruit. Noah was drunken. Abraham prevaricated. David's hands were stained with blood-guiltiness. Isaiah lamented that he was a man of unclean lips. Peter foreswore his faith. John gave way to anger. There is no difference ; we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. The contrition of Joshua was, therefore, becoming in him ; and all the more because of his official position. However he might array himself in white linen when he lifted the veil of the Holy Place, he knew in his inmost heart that before the all-searching eyes his garments were mere shreds and tatters. And therein he was indeed a just representative of the people. For it is written, "We are all as an unclean thing ; and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

(2) "And Satan stood at his right hand to resist (i. e. accuse) him." There is no lack of accusers. Satan is prosecuting attorney and his assistants are without number. God's people are always at the bar of judgment, and alas ! they have little enough to say for themselves. Guilty is the plea. Do their best they ever fall short, and they as well as their adversaries know it. The church is not an organization of good people, but of people who want to be good. They feel their infirmity and realize the need of sympathy and mutual prayer. The church is a great guild of spiritual husbandmen, who are pledged to stand by one another in the effort to live holy and useful lives. The self-righteous people are therefore not in the church, but outside of it ; moralists who think themselves strong enough to get along without sympathy and righteous enough to dispense with prayer. These

are the real Pharisees; these are the ones who note the imperfections of Christians and say to them "Stand aside, for I am holier than thou!" We are in the church, not because we glory in our worthiness as saints, but because we feel ourselves to be sinners. And as such Satan and his fellow-accusers are ever ready to call attention to the spots upon our raiment. It is useless to attempt to please or satisfy them. Our Lord himself said, "I will liken this generation to children sitting in the market-place and calling one to another and saying, 'We have piped unto you and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented.''" In any case the accusation goes on. What then? The best we can do is to quit the game in the market-place; cease trying to please the world and do our utmost to please God.

II. Next in the vision the Lord himself appeared to vindicate Joshua. He stands as the champion of his people; his ear is ever open to their cry. A woman who had been a great sinner once ventured, in token of her grateful penitence, to anoint the feet of Jesus with precious oil of spikenard; and when his disciples murmured against her he said, "Let her alone!" On another occasion the Scribes and Pharisees were making sport of his disciples because of their inability to heal a demoniac boy, when he suddenly appeared among them and looking around with a withering glance, said, "What question ye with them?" Thus he ever befriends his own. He is the champion of all the weak and humble. And at the last when we stand in filthy apparel before the judgment bar, he will be there as our Advocate to plead his righteousness in behalf of all who believe in him.

(1) In this instance he rebuked Satan; not because there was no truth in his charge that Joshua was un-

worthy to minister at God's altar or have part in the rebuilding of the temple, but because of other considerations which made his accusations null and void. (a) "The Lord hath chosen Jerusalem;" that is, the Jewish people. Joshua was one of the chosen. That was enough. For who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; (Rom. 8:31-39). (b) Moreover, some regard was due to the natural infirmity of Joshua. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Had Joshua been an angel, perfection might have been looked for; but he was a sinner, a sinner saved by grace. Is it strange if the charred brand has still the smell of the flames upon it? Too much must not be expected of a soul escaped from death but still wrestling with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.

(2) The Lord having thus rebuked Satan said to his own attendant angels, "Take away from Joshua his filthy garments." And it was done. And unto Joshua he said, "Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee!" Thus does he unclothe his people of their filthy rags and make them worthy to minister before him. He is a great Forgiver. By the cleansing of his blood our iniquities are taken from us; they are removed from us as far as the east is from the west, thrown into the depths of an unfathomable sea, cast behind his back, remembered no more against us. "Come now, saith the Lord, and let us reason together; though your sins are as scarlet they shall be white as snow, and though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." Thus the Lord encouraged Joshua and qualified him, despite his personal unworthiness, to offer sacrifices and join with Zerubbabel in the rebuilding of the Temple. And thus does he stand

at the heavenly tribunal as the Vindicator of the least of his little ones.

“Five bleeding wounds He bears
Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers,
They strongly plead for me;
‘Forgive him, O forgive,’ they cry,
‘Nor let a ransomed sinner die!’”

III. Then, in the vision, the prophet saw Joshua arrayed in garments white and clean. “I will clothe thee,” saith the Lord, “with change of raiment.” Nor was this enough. “Let them set a fair mitre upon his head.” Thus was he encouraged to exercise anew and with increased diligence the functions of his priestly office. The mitre was the high-priest’s glory; (Lev. 8:9). Upon it was a golden band adorned with blue lace and engraven with the legend “**HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.**” In the conferring of this mitre upon the penitent and down-hearted Joshua we note the final and conclusive touch of official restoration. “For this,” saith the Lord, “shall be upon Aaron’s forehead; that he may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.” It was something like what was done for Peter when the Lord, thrice questioning “*Lovest thou me?*” thrice restored him to the apostolic office—from which his consciousness of repeated sin had seemed to disqualify him—with the words, “*Feed my sheep.*” With sins removed, and the mitre replaced upon his head, with its shining legend “like the engraving of a signet,” he might boldly and cheerfully resume his official tasks, though the world and Satan should stand by deriding him.

In all this, however, Joshua was no more righteous of himself than before. He must still have known himself to be a sinner, but a sinner saved by heavenly grace. The old rags and tatters were still his by right; the white garments were the imputed righteousness of his Lord. This is the blessedness of the man whom David describeth, "unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin;" (Rom. 4: 6-8).

IV. The vision closes with the words of a solemn compact or covenant, for the sealing of Joshua's restoration to service. "Thus saith the Lord: If thou wilt walk in my ways and keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house and keep my courts, and I will give thee a place to walk among those that stand by." The promise of perpetual blessing is conditioned on patient continuance in well-doing. To him that hath shall be given. To use ten talents aright is to be promoted to the government of ten cities. He that standeth in his place in the earthly temple shall be assigned to larger service in the heavenly courts. Nor shall he fear the adversary. Here or there—whether it be the pointed finger of a captious critic or the uplifted hand of Satan—he shall not quail or tremble before it. The great cloud of witnesses shall not appal him. He shall have "a place to walk among those that stand by."

A covenant would scarcely be a covenant were there no stone of remembrance. In this case the stone that was laid before Joshua had seven eyes upon it; and the word "Branch" was given to interpret it. Under this title the Messiah was frequently mentioned: "In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious;"

(Isa. 4:2, also 11:1; Jer. 23:5, also 33:15; Zech. 6:12; Luke 1:78, margin). Thus the name of Christ himself is set as the seal of his covenant with Joshua and his people. The seven eyes upon the stone of remembrance tell of his omniscience. He is ever mindful of those who faithfully serve him. No doubt there were seasons of discouragement in the after life of Joshua—times when difficulties seemed insuperable, when the accusations of his own conscience echoed the derision of his foes, when the easier way seemed to be to retire from the work. Then those seven eyes looked down upon him, and the Branch of the Lord encouraged him. Oh, it is a glorious thing to have a covenant with God, and to have it sealed with the all-prevailing Name; to have a stone of remembrance as the symbol of its strength, and seven eyes to speak of an ever-wakeful Providence!

Nor was this all. The word of the Lord came to Joshua, saying, "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." One day there was that outshone all in the Jewish calendar—the great Day of Atonement. It was then that the high-priest entered the Holy of Holies, not without blood, to make atonement for the people. One day there is of which this was but a faint foregleam, the brightest and most glorious that ever dawned—the day when Jesus, a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, bearing our sins in his own body, lifted the veil and—not without blood—passed in to make atonement for all. When the curtain of noonday darkness fell upon him the east was crimsoned with our morning. The day broke. Life and immortality were brought to light.

"In that day saith the Lord shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig-tree." Thus did the Lord vouchsafe to Joshua the promise of

universal peace. It was an earnest of the song that five hundred years later was to waken the morning stillness of the Judæan hills, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, good-will among men."

And the high-priest heeded the vision. By the side of Zerubbabel he took his place in the restoration of the temple. At the altar he ministered for the remission of the people's sins. A new earnestness had been given to his life. The years might come and go, but he could never forget how the man in rags had been clothed in white and a fair mitre put upon his head; he could never forget the covenant, the stone of remembrance, the seven eyes.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD.

ZECH. 4:1-10.

THIS is the fifth of Zechariah's nine visions. Its purpose was like that of all the others, to encourage the people, under the leadership of their priest Joshua and their governor Zerubbabel, to resume the restoration of the temple. The message which it was intended to convey was an assurance of God's presence and readiness to help, and of their utter dependence on him.

I. THE VISION.

(1) The prophet saw "a candlestick all of gold." This is a familiar figure of the church (Rev. 1:20), the medium through which God purposes to flood the world with light. (Matt. 5:14-16).

(2) And upon the top of the candlestick was "a bowl." The light of the Christian Church, like that of the old-time Theocracy, must be fed continually from the divine abundance, or else—as when the oil fails in a lamp—it will flicker and die out. The spiritual oil is the influence of the Spirit of God. The bowl through which it is supplied is Christ himself, from whom the Spirit proceedeth. "Of his fulness have all we received and grace for grace." (John 1:16). He is over all, the head of the church, "which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:23).

(3) And from the bowl were seven pipes leading to the lamps. Not to press the symbolism too far, these

avenues of supply may aptly represent all modes of communion with God. Prayer, meditation, study of the Scriptures, the uplifting of the soul in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, are all viaducts for the impartation of the Holy Spirit. It is promised that whenever and however we draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us. As we ask we receive. Our willingness is our capacity. Our gift of the heavenly influence is measured only by our willingness to receive it. If the tubes communicating with the bowl are clogged or in anywise unserviceable the light flames dim and smoky, a stench to the nostrils and a trial to the eyes. If the lamp is to give light unto all that are in the house it must be fed. Let the believer, then, keep close to God, mindful of the trysting-place and the power of the knees.

(4) And by the side of the bowl were two olive-trees, one upon the right and the other upon the left. These stood for Joshua and Zerubbabel, the civil and ecclesiastical leaders of Israel. (Zech. 4: 11-14). The vision might have been complete without them. God could have rebuilt the temple without the help of either Joshua or Zerubbabel; but he chose to use them. He could convert the world with no respect to human instrumentalities; but for some good reason he does not. The oil in the bowl is pressed from the fruit of the olive-trees. The omnipotent Christ seems unwilling to exert his power in evangelization except as his people "stand by." They must be willing in the day of his power. There is herein a strange linking of our petty potencies with the illimitable energies of the Infinite. God's resources are without measure; yet they seem meagre at times, until we replenish them by saying "Give forth!" A mighty honor is this which is conferred upon the olive-trees.

II. THE INTERPRETATION.

The prophet was greatly puzzled by this vision; and he said to the angel "What are these?" The interpretation was given in such form as would be likely to make it most effective for the enterprise in hand.

First. "This is the word of Jehovah unto Zerubbabel: *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord!*" Rulers and people must understand at the outset that as God's chosen they were utterly dependent on him. The prophet Hosea had uttered a similar admonition two hundred years before, "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them, not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, nor by horses or horsemen, but by the Lord their God." (Ho. 1:7). And five hundred years later the Lord appeared to the apostle Paul and girded him with the same truth, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9). It is true for every man, in every age. Not with a strong right arm can we make our spiritual livelihood; not with a mighty intellect can we plan and execute the purposes of a holy life. The Spirit of the living God must quicken, energize, inspire. If he be with us, our strength is indeed made perfect in weakness; if he be with us who shall be against us?

Second. The vision was interpreted to mean that difficulties should not block the way. At this time the princes of the neighboring tribes were doing their utmost to hinder the work; but they should not prevail. "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain!" All hindrances should disappear, as the highest of the Andes will crumble at the last when God shall touch it with his almighty hand. Nothing is too hard for him. Kings and potentates are no more to

him than grasshoppers in the pathway of an advancing army. Do they cry, "Let us break his bands asunder and cast away his cords from us"? He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. (Psalm 2). It is the Lord that lifteth up and that casteth down. Mountains and molehills are alike to him.

Third. The vision gave assurance of the ultimate completion of the temple. The work had languished for years. Successive relays of workmen had taken up the trowel and laid it down. But as to the final issue there was no shadow of doubt: the headstone was to be brought forth and laid in its place with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!" And this was to be done under the existing administration. "Thus saith the Lord, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house; his hands shall also finish it." The author shall be the finisher. And if stronger assurance were needed, the covenant with its stone of remembrance must give it. Again those seven eyes! The stone with the seven eyes upon it should be a monument of the divine veracity and faithfulness. That stone of remembrance—the token of the covenant, the symbol of Messiah's strength and wisdom—should itself be the headstone of the corner. (Psa. ? 118:22; Matt. 21:42). Let not the people be disheartened in the day of small things—the clearing away of rubbish heaps, the hewing of timber, the laying of one granite block on another. Let them rather rejoice because the plummet is in the hand of Zerubbabel and the stone of remembrance with its seven eyes is beside him. "And these," said the angel, "are the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth!" The day of great things was coming. The people would assemble in fulness of time to the dedication of the temple. The top-

stone of the corner would be laid with the voice of thanksgiving, and the mountains round about Jerusalem would ring with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!"

This was the vision and this the interpretation thereof. It carried strength and courage to the heart of Judah. Has it no present blessing for us?

III. PRACTICAL.

We are living in the dispensation of the Spirit. Our Lord has breathed upon us saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." If spiritual success under the Old Economy was hypothecated upon the working of the Spirit, how much more in the New. The Church is the organism through which the Spirit is working towards the restitution of all things. It was the infant church at Pentecost that received the unspeakable gift. The sound of the rushing wind, the gift of tongues, the flame upon the forehead were for us. If we have them not it is because we will not have them. If our work languishes, like a temple with half-finished walls, it is because, in default of willingness to be blest, the heart has gone out of us.

A prophet once standing by the river Chebar saw a striking figure of the church (Ezekiel 1). It was a mechanism of wheels; a fire infolding itself, and wheels within wheels; and the wheels were full of eyes. And living creatures stood round about; at their going the air was resonant with the rustle of wings and a voice was heard like the roar of ocean. And within the mechanism there was a Spirit, the motive Power: so that whithersoever the Spirit was to go the wheels went; they went straight forward, for the living Spirit was in them. The history of the Christian Church is the record of a mysterious Power working through human agencies. For lack of appre-

hension at this point Hume and Gibbon were at their wits' end. They could write history, but they could not understand it. They saw the wheels, they heard the sound of their going; but they perceived not the Spirit that was in them.

The eleven who knelt at Pentecost to receive the baptism of fire and power went forth thus endued to revolutionize and conquer the world. Had that been told to Cæsar how he would have laughed. But where is he?

“Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.”

But the Church—the mechanism of wheels moved by the Spirit, the eleven under the baptism of fire—

“Unshaken as the eternal hills,
Immovable she stands;
A mountain that shall fill the earth,
A house not made with hands.”

The Church is the one great power in history. It has grown like a mustard seed from the day of small things. To-day it is carrying bread and water to the famishing, and light to such as sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Its influence is inexplicable on any except supernatural grounds. It is animated by the breath of the Omnipotent. The Spirit is in the wheels.

At every point of Christian faith and life we are dependent on this influence. If we grieve the Spirit by unwitting slight we suffer for it. If we quench the Spirit by rejection we die for it.

(1) Our life begins with the operation of the Spirit in the new birth. It is his function to reveal God, his to convince of sin, his to take of the things of Jesus and show them unto us. Regeneration is a mystery; it is none the

less a tremendous fact. The destiny of the soul hinges upon it. Except a man be born of water (that is cleansing from sin) and of the Spirit (that is unto newness of life) he shall in no wise see the kingdom of God.

(2) Our sanctification, also, is through the Spirit. Life is structural. In the Scriptures the higher life is frequently likened to the building of a temple. The word "edification" means literally temple-building. The moral constitution of the believer—heart, conscience, brain, self—is said to be a temple for the indwelling of the Spirit of God. To make it so we must have the Spirit's help. He must teach us to pray. He must open our eyes that we may behold wonderful things out of God's word. He must so commend to us our pains and sorrows as that we shall be duly exercised thereby. It is thus that character grows; and only thus that we attain unto the full stature of manhood in Christ. Nor is this influence forced upon us. We are free to grieve the Spirit. The lichen that clings to the wall is as thirsty as the lily of the valley; but it makes no sign when the dew falls, while the lily swings a censer of fragrance in return for it. The dull nature that will not be blessed may have its way; but the truest man, in whom is greatest fulness of life, is he who opens every avenue and bids the Spirit enter. A symmetrical character comes in no other way. Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it.

(3) And our success in Christian service is conditioned in the same way. If we have really cast in our fortunes with the Son of God we are concerned above all things for the triumph of his cause and kingdom. To worship in his courts is our delight. The sound of the rushing, mighty wind which betokens a revival of earnestness among his people is sweeter than all music to our

ears. And when souls come to salvation as doves that flock to their windows, ah, that is as if the Master himself were walking past! But these things are nothing to us unless his Spirit animates us. We are like ships becalmed at sea, while other ships go sailing past in the distance bearing the commerce of the world. Becalmed! Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon us! Then shall God's kingdom be more to us than all kingdoms and principalities, and with diligence shall we set our hands to the stones of the wall.

If any Christian is without the power of the Spirit it is his own fault. The promise is large and free. If earthly parents know how to give good things to their children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. Do we want the Spirit? Let us ask. Were a lad of ours, returning from a far country, to come staggering to our door famished and gasping for bread, would we refuse him? No more will our Heavenly Father refuse us the unspeakable gift. At this moment, reader of these words, the Spirit is waiting to come in.

“Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet;

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”

Enter, O Spirit of the living God; enter, and fully and forevermore possess thine own!

DEDICATING THE TEMPLE.

EZRA 6:14-22.

At last!

The rebuilding of the Temple had been commenced B. C. 534. In the following year the work was suspended, and, except for brief and ineffective efforts at considerable intervals, was not resumed until B. C. 520. After four years of continuous effort it was finished B. C. 516. Thus for a period of eighteen years the work dragged its slow length along. And all so needlessly! Had the people been like-minded with the Lord there would have been no trembling in fear of their adversaries, no misgivings as to the outcome, no turning aside to secular pursuits, and so no dreary intervals of sloth. But they took counsel of themselves and tarried, while God stood by waiting until they should be willing in the day of his power.

We are ever hindering our work in like manner. Life would be an unbroken series of successes if God could have his way with us. But being strong of ourselves and wise in our own conceit we insist on the full length of our tether. Thus we botch everything, make mountains of mole-hills, see ghosts in twilight shadows, jostle one another in headlong panic, tread upon our own heels, lengthen a morning walk into a wilderness journey, pray listlessly, sing mechanically, and cry with unction if not with reason, "How long, O Lord, how long!" He waits until we shall be reasonable. Faith is the most reasonable thing in the world. The goal appears whenever we can say, "Lord, I believe."

So at last the Temple was ready for its topstone. After fourteen years of dallying, four years of diligence

were enough to finish it. Faith and works coöperated. Either without the other is dead as a marble image of Psyche. There is a mighty truth in the homely maxim, "Trust in God and keep your powder dry." True faith never sits trembling and lamenting; it rolls up its sleeves and materializes its hopes. In all our temple building—whether the fabric be personal character or God's kingdom on earth—we speed or tarry as we will. Four years are better than fourteen, if we wish them so. We pray "Thy kingdom come," but when would we have it? A hundred years hence when we are dead and gone? Why not straightway? If God's people were in earnest, wielding the trowel as they pray, and always trusting God, there is no reason within human ken why the kingdom should not come in a twelvemonth. We make our own delays. The Lord's chariot is at his door; we shall hear it rumbling this way whenever our faith and diligence shall have cast up the highways. Therefore, as we gather to-day with these Israelites at the dedication of their temple, let us highly resolve that our only tarrying shall be upon our knees, and that our only waiting shall be expectant waiting on the Lord. For they that wait only upon him shall renew their strength. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

We are here advised as to the accessories by which the builders of the Temple, when once they showed a disposition to work, were enabled to succeed. And as the same are available for all believers, it will be worth while to notice them.

First, God was with them. It is written, "They finished the work according to the commandment (rather, the decree) of the God of Israel." All along he had been

predisposed in their behalf. We, also, are exhorted to work out our own salvation (the word "salvation" being used in its larger sense as inclusive of all things that enter into the fulness of spiritual life) because it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Not only had God decreed the building of the Temple, he had prescribed the minutest details of its construction. In like manner we are under his direction and control in everything pertaining to our spiritual growth, our service in the fellowship of faith, and our relations with his kingdom every way.

Second, The children of Israel were "prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo." God was pleased to communicate with them through his ordained servants. Haggai was an old man whose strength lay largely in admonition. Zechariah was younger, more inclined to the dreaming of hopeful dreams and the seeing of bright visions. Now one spoke and then the other, as occasion required. It has pleased God to endow his ministers with divers gifts. There are so many voices and none of them is without signification. There are diversities of gifts, but it is the same Spirit, and there are differences of administration, but it is the same Lord. (1 Cor. 12:4). The word of God thus administered is for our edification, for our admonition and encouragement. If we lose courage or lay down the trowel to turn to the plow, then let the prophets cry aloud and spare not. God could have wrought without Haggai and Zechariah; to-day, if he were so minded, he could demit his ministers and accomplish his purposes without them. But he prefers otherwise. The ministers of the people are ordained to bring them up to an adequate sense of their privilege and re-

sponsibility and to keep them there. And, if faithful to their trust, they are held in honor as the seven stars that shine in the Lord's signet. (Rev. 1: 16).

Third, The Israelites were encouraged by the favorable attitude of temporal princes. "They builded according to the commandment of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes." These were all Zoroastrians, but God used them. They were more or less unwitting instruments in the accomplishment of his designs. So are all kings and potentates. Whether they will or not, they serve him. Cyrus, though he bowed in the temple of Ormuzd, was called Jehovah's "servant." (Isa. 44: 26). In His hand are the hearts of kings as the rivers of water. Pharaoh was made to show forth His power. (Rom. 9: 17). Pilate bore testimony to the doctrine of His incarnation. (Luke 23: 4). The mighty ones all grace his triumph, some at the ropes, others at the chariot wheels. A blessed truth and full of consolation is this to all believers. For there are times when the enemy cometh in as a flood and the air is thick with flying arrows. But God knows. His ægis, though we see it not, is over us like a pavilion, and our place of defence is the munition of rocks. No fortress could hold us so securely as the assurance of his love. Our trials and adversities, that seem like robbers and assassins hiding among the clefts, are made to walk beside us as our escort to heaven's gate. Surely, O Lord, the wrath of men shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. (Psa. 76: 10).

Thus it was that the children of Israel completed the restoration of their temple. Now we are come to witness its dedication. It was on the third day of the month Adar, "the month of splendor," so called because of the brightness of its suns and the beauty of its flowers. This

was the third of the great dedications. The Tabernacle of the wilderness had been dedicated more than a thousand years before, on the first day of the first month, B. C. 1652. Solomon's temple had been dedicated almost five hundred years before, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, B. C. 1007. The magnificent ceremonies of that day were handed down as a dream of unsurpassable glory. How paltry must the present pomp and pageantry have seemed by contrast! Nevertheless, on this occasion there was no lack of rejoicing. "They kept the dedication of this house with joy."

(1) A hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs were offered in sacrifice; "and for a sin-offering twelve he-goats for all Israel." There is something pathetic in the mention of these he-goats. Ten of the twelve tribes, having cut themselves loose from their brethren, had little or no part in the building of this temple; but they were remembered, and a place in the sin-offering was sacredly reserved for them. It was as when mothers set vacant chairs for their absent wayward sons on Thanksgiving day. Whatever might happen, the religious unity of Israel must be preserved. They were one "chosen people." Their political divisions had indeed been obliterated by the captivity, and there was no reason why they should not reassemble at one altar, an altar of twelve stones "according to the number of the sons of Jacob." (1 Kings 18:31). In like manner the Church of Jesus Christ, however parted asunder by the controversies of the past, should be at one in the work of the kingdom and in the rejoicings of the triumph of Christ. For, conceding the necessity of diversity in opinion and polity, we have still and evermore "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all."

(2) Moreover, at this dedication the ancient order of service was restored. "The priests were set in their divisions and the Levites in their courses for the service of God." There was no attempt at needless innovation. The assignments of the priests and Levites dated back to the time of Moses (Numb. 3:6-10), and nothing had occurred to abrogate them. A thousand years of usage had fastened them upon the nation's heart. It does not follow that because a custom is old it is obsolete. Prayer is as old as human want, like the air we breathe, and time can make no improvement upon it. No man of means can afford to wear a threadbare or cast-off garment. The church must be abreast of the age. So must every Christian. But in laying aside the garments that have kept us warm on winter days let us be sure we do not bare ourselves to wind and frost; and let the church, in keeping up with the times, take heed lest she get before the pillar of cloud and fire. Our progress can never be too rapid if only God leads the way.

It should be observed that the Feast of the Passover was among the venerable customs which were revived at this dedication. It was a foreshadowing of the Atonement of Christ, without which all other pomp and circumstance of service are a dumb show. A church without Christ is a house without a foundation. A prayer without Christ is as vain as the cry, "O Baal, hear us!" A life without Christ falls short of all its best privileges and possibilities. In whatever else we fail let us keep the Passover; of whatever else we may be ignorant, let us know Christ and him crucified.

It is significant that, whereas the previous record (from chap. 4:8) was in the Chaldee language, the Hebrew is resumed at this point. The story of the Captivity,

when God's face seemed to be hidden from his people, might well be written in a foreign tongue, but the Captivity ends with the resumption of the Passover. Christ breaks the Babylonish chains, and the prisoner comes forth singing his deliverance in the language of Canaan. The moment the soul is made vitally acquainted with him, its prison-doors are opened. He is the free man whom the Son makes free.

(3) Then the rejoicing. "And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord had made them joyful." There are stolen pleasures which leave behind them a remorseful pain. There is a laughter which is as the crackling of thorns. But blessed are they whom the Lord maketh joyful! The springs of all true pleasure are in him. "Happiness," wrote Pascal, "is neither within us nor without us; it is the union of ourselves with God." It was meet that the return of the chosen people to their first love should be celebrated with feasting and merry-making. The occasion was signalized by the introduction of the Hallelujah Psalms. (Psa. 146-150). "Praise ye the Lord!" they sang, while the sanctuary echoed with clash of cymbal and blast of trumpet. "Praise ye the Lord! He looseth the prisoners; he raiseth up them that are bowed down; he preserveth the strangers; he exalteth the horn of his people; he shall reign for ever! Praise ye the Lord!"

We too are temple-builders. In the making of character we lay grace upon grace as masons lay stone upon stone. And in the broader work of uprearing the kingdom of righteousness on earth, we also, unless we are mere cumberers, have a place of usefulness assigned to us. Let us learn, while the songs of happy Israel still linger in our ears, that all depends on God. In vain is our

planning and our striving without him. With his blessing all things, even the gins and snares of the enemy, shall be made to work together for us.

“Not as we thought ; but what are we !
Above our broken dreams and plans
God lays, with wiser hands than man’s,
The corner-stone of things to be.”

And at last the joy of the Lord, as of those that tread the vintage, shall be ours. We shall keep the Passover in the heavenly courts, and remember the years of our Captivity as a dream when one awaketh. Serve the Lord, therefore, with gladness, O ye people ! Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. For the mercy of the Lord is everlasting ; his truth endureth unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord !

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER.

NEHEMIAH I: I-II.

IT is now seventy years since that memorable day when the restored temple was dedicated with sacrifice and song. Seventy years are a long time, the full lifetime of a man. The returned exiles who had settled in Jerusalem should have accomplished much in seventy years. Those were times when men and nations were making their mark. In Persia the great Xerxes had made himself an immortal name. Rome had just come under the military tribunes. Greece was on her way to national glory. Socrates was teaching in Athens. The news of Marathon and Thermopylæ was fresh from the heralds' lips. In a period of such universal progress we should expect to hear that the Judæan colony had made great forward strides. But not so. They had in many particulars improved their personal estate, but the walls and gates of the city were still in ruins. In those times a city unprotected by walls was open to every foe. The homes of Jerusalem were exposed to constant danger, and at any moment its temple might be looted by the neighboring idolatrous tribes. This was a sad state of affairs, and it was due probably to the fact that every man in Israel had been looking to his own welfare; for the love of gain dwelt in the Jewish breast then as now. A flourishing trade had been established with other nations; there were stalls for Phœnician fishermen and booths for traders from Tyre. So much of the open spaces near the gates had been cleared away as was necessary for the marketing of figs and grapes and the harvests

that were gathered from the fertile slopes of the surrounding hills. But otherwise the rubbish heaps remained. The colony seemed lacking in all patriotic *esprit*. It yielded without a murmur to Persian requisitions of men for the army and money for their support. Nor did the encroachments of their petty neighbors awake them to measures of vigilance. They submitted to pillage; they saw their countrymen borne away into slavery and offered no resistance worthy of the name. The dangers of life in Jerusalem were so notorious that it was regarded as an evidence of great heroism to continue there. Most of the families had resorted to their ancestral allotments in the country round about. At length men had to be chosen by lot to reside in the city. "And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem."

It would have been a comparatively easy matter to repair the walls; but, apart from money-getting, these people were greatly given to inertia. They were always so. God must sound his trumpet on the hills to rally them. To-day their children, the Russian Jews, are deporting themselves in the same way. The love of personal gain is their most conspicuous feature. Loyal to their ancestral traditions, persistent, indomitable, patient, phlegmatic, though the sympathy of the whole earth is with them, they would rather fly than fight. The worship of God remains even to-day—for wherever Jews are found they are monotheists—but the walls of Jerusalem are as neglected as ever. They are a devout, defenceless people, plucked and plundered and wronged and persecuted. The world over they are the same people they were when they dwelt in their unprotected city two thousand five hundred years ago.

The man who, in this instance, appeared as their deliverer was cup-bearer to Artaxerxes the king of Persia. This was an office of great honor and responsibility, corresponding in a measure to that of our American Secretary of State. It was about as high as a man could aspire without fixing his eye on the throne itself. Nehemiah, therefore, having the temperament of a Jew, should have been content; but he was not. Selfishness had not yet taken entire possession of him. He had "a soul above buttons." On being made aware of the condition of things at Jerusalem he could not rest until he had devised some plan of betterment. The knowledge was brought, as we are informed, by "Hanani and certain men of Judah." These had been at Jerusalem with their brethren, and for some reason, most likely on a commercial errand, had returned to Persia. On being questioned as to affairs in the Holy City, they related all: how the returned captives were "in great affliction and reproach," how the ruined walls and gates were still unrestored.

Josephus gives a more circumstantial account of this interview. He says that while Nehemiah was walking about the courts of the Persian palace his attention was drawn to a group of persons speaking in the Hebrew tongue. On addressing them he found that they were recently from Jerusalem, and that one of them, Hanani, was his kinsman. Leading them to a secluded place, he drew from them the whole lamentable story. From that moment he could not rest. He was inexpressibly shocked and grieved. He had previously supposed that his countrymen in the distant colony were prosperous and happy; and lo, they were in great affliction and reproach. He could not sleep for thinking of it. He "sat down and wept and mourned and fasted certain days." If that were

all, his sympathy and painful solicitude would have gone for naught; but "he prayed before the God of heaven."

"Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray," says the apostle. (James 5:13.) In all times of sorrow and adversity this is the divinely appointed way of relief. To your knees, O mourner! Spend not your time in fruitless lamentations, but take hold upon the strength of Him who is a refuge from the storm and a shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. How many a soul has found daybreak in the trysting-place! How many a despairing one has lifted up his voice to the Omnipotent, like a strangling swimmer calling for help, and has sung his thanksgiving afterward as David did, "This poor man cried; and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his trouble!"

But if this be true of sorrow on one's own account, how much more surely will God hear the petitioner who pleads for others. For selfishness in prayer is no more comely than anywhere else. The royal cup-bearer had all that could ordinarily minister to comfort and prosperity. Why was he not satisfied to let well enough alone? He had never been at Jerusalem, and the colonists there were strangers to him. But it was the city of his fathers, and they were his brethren, wherefore his heart went out towards them. Would that we all were as solicitous for the welfare of the whole household of faith!

This man was a layman. He might easily have shifted the responsibility for the present condition of things upon the priests and Levites, on whom God had particularly devolved the religious interests of Jewry. But laymen then were no more absolved from such re-

sponsibility than are laymen in these days. Indeed, some of the affairs of Zion belong distinctively to them. We lament over the declensions of the church; even our ministers are not always above the suspicion of having abandoned the landmarks of faith. They continue the services of the altar; but alas! in such a case the walls are down and the gates open to the enemy. Then let God's laymen rally! Never yet was Zion safely left to her priests alone. There is always something for Nehemiah to do. In many a stress of the tempest in past ecclesiastical history the prayers and efforts of laymen and laywomen standing on the headlands have brought the vessel safe to land.

The prayer of Nehemiah in this instance is given doubtless for our guidance. It is a model of supplication in many ways. Observe

First, its reverent spirit. It begins with adoration: "O Jehovah, God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him!" In our eagerness to present our requests at the throne of the heavenly grace there is always danger of precipitation. It must not be forgotten that we are approaching the Infinite. Do men rush headlong with their petitions into the audience-chambers of earthly kings? The Lord—however we may draw near in holy boldness—sitteth upon a throne high and lifted up. He is our Creator; we are, in comparison with him, no better than ants or insects or motes flying in a sunbeam. Therefore a reverent humility becomes us.

Second, Nehemiah makes confession of his sins: "We have sinned against thee; both I and my father's house have sinned." The blind man was not far from right in saying, "God heareth not sinners; but if any man doeth

his will, him he heareth." (John 9:31.) We must put aside our iniquities on the instant of approach. Confession is the laying off of the beggar's rags; pardon is the putting on of the best robe; then the suppliant stands clothed as a son before God. This cup-bearer knew that sin lay at the bottom of all Israel's troubles. For the sins of his fathers they had been led into captivity; for the sins of those now dwelling at Jerusalem their walls were still in ruins. It is an easy thing, however, to confess the sins of one's fathers and of kinsmen a thousand miles away. But Nehemiah did not so content himself: "Both I and my father's house have sinned." Spurgeon says, "He spelled 'we' with an 'I' in it." His own transgressions and shortcomings loomed up before him. He felt that he himself, though so far away, was not without blame for the afflictions of Zion.

Third, observe his confidence in the divine word. This was the prayer of faith. He casts himself upon the promises of God which are evermore Yea and Amen. He ventures to particularize: he puts God in remembrance of a certain covenant which he had been pleased to make long before with Moses his servant in behalf of his people. The terms of this covenant are gathered from various passages of ancient Scripture, showing that Nehemiah was no novice in the Word of God. Bible-lovers make the most successful petitioners. Here is the covenant referred to: "*I will scatter you abroad among the nations; but if ye turn unto me and keep my commandments and do them, though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence and bring them unto the place where I have chosen to set my name.*" (Lev. 26:27-45; Deut. 28:45-67; also 30:1-10.) A glorious word of promise,

that, for a nation of stiff-necked exiles ! And the fact that on the part of the people themselves this covenant had been broken does not prevent Nehemiah from putting God in remembrance of it ; for he knows that God is of long-suffering and tender mercy. We also have personal covenants with him respecting our loved ones ; and at times our hearts misgive us because we have come so far short of their conditions ; but let us plead on and hold up the blessed parchment before our Father's eyes. He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust. He is not an exacting taskmaster. The man who puts an utmost confidence in His word of promise has discovered where the strength of God lieth. Faith at the mercy-seat conquers all.

Fourth, the prayer of Nehemiah was specific. He purposed going into the presence of Artaxerxes himself to plead for his people. In so doing he might endanger his own tenure of office and injure the cause which he desired to promote. Oriental sovereigns were largely guided by caprice. God must be with him. He could not succeed otherwise. To this end he pleads, "O Lord, prosper thy servant and give him mercy in the sight of this man." It is the part of wisdom to enter upon all enterprises with prayer. A Roman general would not march to battle until he had first offered a sacrifice. A right apprehension of this principle would keep us always in the spirit of prayer, because no man can estimate the importance of any act. The least thing we do may have momentous and eternal issues. Therefore "pray without ceasing" is our safe motto. Nehemiah trembled when he thought of his coming interview with Artaxerxes ; so would we if we knew the far-reaching results of commonplace events in our daily life. He fortified himself

with prayer ; so let us every moment—for every moment we stand at the threshold of a King greater than Artaxerxes—be praying, “God be with us!” We cannot go up hence except the Lord be with us.

Fifth, this prayer was followed by the use of appropriate means. Nehemiah went in unto the king and was graciously received. The first words that greeted his request were, “For how long shall thy journey be ; and when wilt thou return?” The way was opened and means were furnished, and when we next see Nehemiah he will be at Jerusalem leading the workmen in the rebuilding of the walls. There is a sense in which God expects us to help answer our own prayers. The man who prays for bread and then sits idle expecting loaves to fall before him, is likely to die hungry. But if he will go out into the fields and sow the seed, and harrow and reap and garner it, and carry the grain to mill, and bring it home again and knead and bake it, he will have bread in answer to his prayer. And it will be just as really from God as if he had suddenly awakened and found it lying at his feet.

Thus we perceive in Nehemiah's prayer all the essential parts of true devotion ; to wit, adoration, confession, faith, specific petition, and the proper use of means. But, after all, the form of prayer is a matter of minor consideration. It is not so important that we should know the set phrases and due order as that we should want something and mean what we say.

“Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.”

It is comforting to know that our Father's ear is open to the cry—even the inarticulate cry—of his children. A woman once came to the temple in bitterness of soul and knelt there, moving her lips but making no sound. Great was her desire, yet she uttered not a word. And the Lord answered her and "granted the petition that she had asked of him." (1 Sam. 1:9-18.) Oh he is the kindest and most considerate of friends! He takes the will for the deed. He cares more for the wordless sob of a returning prodigal than for the Pharisee's longest and loudest supplication. When our groanings cannot be uttered his own Spirit maketh intercession for us. Pray, therefore; pray earnestly, trustfully, importunately. Pray without ceasing. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

REBUILDING THE WALL.

NEHEMIAH 4:9-21.

THE Lord's servant, like a king's herald, must put spurs to his horse. Duty is as imperative as the divine seal can make it. Nehemiah had no sooner received permission to go to Jerusalem than he arose and went. On reaching his destination he did not disclose his intentions at once, but kept his eyes open. The third night after his arrival he made the circuit of the city, alone, by moonlight. His heart was oppressed by the desolation on every side. Three words told the story: "Jerusalem lieth waste!" The walls were shattered and breached, the gateways open, the streets littered with ruins and rubbish-heaps.

A man of small faith or timid purpose would have been disheartened at the outset. Not so Nehemiah. Calling the rulers of the city together, he related what he had seen, and said, "Up, let us build!" There was inspiration in his very presence. This was the Chief Counsellor of the great Artaxerxes who had come to encourage them. There was no withstanding his infectious courage and enthusiasm. "And the people said, Let us rise up and build!" No sooner said than done. Word was sent to the hamlets and villages; the able-bodied men of Judah came hastening in; they were properly divided and assigned to work. Hammer and trowel awoke the echoes of Gihon and Olivet. Merrily the hearts of the masons and burden-carriers responded to their leaders' hopeful words, and for a brief season all went well.

But only for a season. No holy purpose ever yet

went unchallenged to its fulfilment. The neighboring tribes and peoples were moved with jealousy. Their fathers had told them of the former days when Jerusalem was a tower of strength, and who could tell the outcome of the restoration of her ruined walls? The movement was a menace to their own welfare and local supremacy. They must arrest it.

First they tried laughter. (Neh. 4:1-3.) Two of these enemies—Sanballat, a Moabitish chief, and Tobiah, a renegade Jew who held some petty office among the Samaritans—made themselves especially conspicuous in this way. The former wagged his head and looked askance, saying, "What do these feeble Jews? Are they getting ready for a holocaust? or do they call those things fortifications? Will they revive the stones out of the rubbish and ash-heaps?" And Tobiah gayly responded, "Yes, and when their ramparts are done, if a fox go up he shall break them down!" So they had their sport at the expense of the busy workmen. But he laughs best who laughs last.

God's people at work on the walls of Zion are continually told that it is no use; they shall have their labor for their pains; the church is losing its grip; missions are a failure. "You have been at work on an unregenerate world for eighteen centuries, and with what result? Look at the ruins and rubbish-heaps that remain. There are twelve hundred millions of pagans still! Leave off your Quixotic dreams. Be fools no longer. Go back to your vineyards and wheat-fields!" And occasionally the voice of some pessimistic Christian—as false to his lineage as the renegade Tobiah—echoes the Horonite's derision. But the work continues on the walls of Jerusalem. The light of the gospel spreads afar, and

the Church of Jesus Christ shall yet be the joy of the whole earth.

The fingers of all Rome and Jewry were pointed at the eleven men—humble, uncultured, and penniless—who came out of the upper chamber with high purposes of universal evangelization ; but they separated to their several tasks, and each of them has multiplied himself into a million many times. A hundred years ago William Carey was dubbed “the consecrated cobbler” for proposing the evangelization of India, but to-day all Christendom delights to do him honor. God crowns the heroism that can face an epithet. He may permit Sanballat and Tobiah to have their joke, but his throne is in Jerusalem and her walls are his especial care. The laughter of his impious foes who would break his bands asunder is ever turned into wailing. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh !

All efforts at political or social betterment are met in the same manner. The Temperance Reform, thank God, has lived down laughter. The movement in behalf of Sabbath Observance is getting past it. When our Senate and House of Representatives unite in demanding the closing of the gates of the Columbian Fair on the Lord’s day, the Sanballats and Tobiahs of newspaper and rostrum begin to look serious and cast about for better weapons than flings at Puritanism. And so it goes. In every enterprise that touches truth and righteousness ridicule must have its day.

The same is true of the rebuilding of personal character. One would suppose that when a poor wretch sees the error of his ways and resolves on better things all his fellows would applaud him ; but they always do the other thing. They chaff him, deride him, make sport of him.

"What's the use? A glass wont hurt you. Going to let your wife get the upper hand, eh? Join the Holy Club? Oh come on!" It is hard work to rebuild the walls of manhood out of the rubbish-heaps of mislived years while old comrades stand by pointing their fingers and cracking jokes, but by God's grace it can be done. It has been done ten thousand times and more, is being done by brave men everywhere to-day.

Secondly, the opposition to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem assumed the form of threatening. The enemies of the workmen said, "What is this that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?" (Neh. 2:19.) They proposed to inform Artaxerxes of what was going on. The construction of a fortification like this was a menace to the Persian Empire. They were trusted officers of the king and their word would doubtless have weight with him. Rebellion was a capital offence. The Jews had tasted the edge of Persian retribution more than once. Well might they tremble now. But they did not tremble, because God was their helper and was with them.

A good work is always in the realm of danger, because it is in the nature of *lese majesty*, rebellion against the prince of this world. An active and aggressive Christian is never left unwarned. A reformer never goes scot free. The time for crying, Off with his head! is past, but there are other ways of reaching the same end. Loss of business or of social standing; ostracism, like that which teachers under the Freedmen's Bureau suffered after the war; political decapitation, like that which some men endure for their religious principles—these are some of the moral boycotts and penalties which a true man is ever called upon to confront in the discharge of duty. It takes a full-grown man—one of God's men—to stand up

against them. To be afraid of the devil is the vice of a fetich-worshipper; to fear God only is the part of a Christian. The only real danger in this world is that one may fall short of duty.

On one occasion an effort was made to terrify Nehemiah by reporting that the enemy was at the gates. A miserable coward named Shemaiah ventured to admonish him, saying, "Let us to the temple and shut the doors, for they will slay thee!" His answer is worthy of a place among the golden words of heroism: "Should such a man as I flee? Who is there that being in my case would flee to the temple to save his life? I will not go!" There are times when a man's place is in the temple, but not when God has called him to the wall.

All possible devices were used to drive this devoted leader and his workmen from their appointed task. Alliances were formed against them. Messages were sent from distant parts of the colony saying to the workmen, "Return; you are wanted at home." Bribery was employed. No scheme was left untried; and still the work went on.

Then, *thirdly*, the enemy proposed a compromise. A message was sent by Sanballat and Tobiah, "Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." (Neh. 6:2.) Four several times they solicited a conference on this manner; only to be met by the effective rebuff, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

The temptation to meet the enemy half way in overtures so specious is almost irresistible. But duty knows no compromise. To a Christian compromise means worldly conformity. Danger lies that way. The only way to serve God is unreservedly. The only way to avoid

evil is not to tamper with it. The apparently innocent diversions of Vanity Fair gave the Pilgrim more trouble than all the giants and lions along his way. Diluted theology and limp morals—and we are having them in abundance—will sap the vitality of the most vigorous man or church. The only safe answer to a proposal of compromise is, “I cannot come down.”

The meanest chapters in our American history are those which tell the story of compromise. It fastened slavery on our country and ultimately landed us in civil war. Lincoln once said, “Nothing is settled until it is settled right.” With the best intent in the world Henry Clay secured the enactment of a law excluding slavery from that part of the Louisiana Cession lying north of the parallel $36^{\circ}30'$, and by inference permitting it elsewhere. This was designed to be in the interest of free soil, but—as is the nature of compromise—it worked the other way. Simple cerate never cured a cancer yet; nothing but the knife can do it.

Our public-school system is to-day in danger of being destroyed by compromise. The friends of parochial schools are clamoring for a portion of the public funds. The argument is subtle and persuasive. But the moment the State is subsidized in the interest of a sect the American principle of religious freedom and equality is torn asunder; and when the Government becomes in any way a coparcener with denominational instruction there is an end of our boasted divorcement of Church and State. The issue is of vital consequence. The Government has a fixed policy. It is doing a splendid work in free, non-sectarian education. It “cannot come down.”

The point is well taken in all relations of life. No compromise! Right is right; to dilute it makes it

wrong. Truth is truth ; to adulterate it makes it error. Duty is duty ; to alloy it with disobedience is to make it sin. There is danger in "the villages of the plain of Ono." There is no safety anywhere but in one's place upon the wall.

We have noted the persistent efforts to draw Nehemiah and his men away from duty ; it will be profitable to observe in brief detail how these efforts were met.

First, by prayer. Nehemiah was a praying man. He rose from his knees to exhort the builders, "Be not afraid ! Remember Jehovah, the great and terrible ; and fight for your brethren, your homes, your wives and children !" John Knox is said to have bedewed the walls of his closet with his tears of supplication. George Washington was glad to profess his dependence on God. Abraham Lincoln, when asked if he was accustomed to pray, answered, "The man who would assume to perform the duties of the Presidency without seeking divine guidance must be a blockhead." It is easy to concede the importance of prayer in troublous times, but it should be remembered that the quietest day has eternal issues. No man can ever afford to spend a prayerless day.

Second, a watch was set against the enemy day and night. One half of the men were armed with spears and bows. Every mason had a sword girded upon him. A trumpeter went about at Nehemiah's side. The word was given, "In whatsoever place ye hear the clarion, thither resort unto us !" The countersign was given ; it was the very same that long afterwards rang from the lips of the Roundheads in their struggle for English freedom, "GOD WITH US !" (verse 20.) There is a question as to the authorship of this famous maxim, "Trust in God and keep your powder dry !" Nehemiah originated it. His trust

found expression in prayer ; his powder was a compound of vigilance and valor. No enterprise fails that is backed by faith and works.

Third, Nehemiah and his men kept on working. They did not cease carrying burdens and laying stone because there were footfalls on the opposite hills. "Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work and with the other held a weapon." Higher and higher rose the walls. The breaches were repaired. The great gates were presently swung into place. Then all Jerusalem breathed freely. The trowels were laid by and men with a good conscience said, "Let us return to our shops and booths, our fields and vineyards." To do so before would have been to court adversity ; now as they went their several ways the blessing of the Lord went with them.

The entire work of repairing the wall was finished in the brief period of fifty-two days. It is amazing how much can be accomplished by those who set about it in the right way. Prayer, vigilance, and patient continuance in well doing can work wonders. "So we labored in the work." There is a volume of meaning in that little word "so." When the church learns its full significance the day of Christ will dawn. A willing people, unceasingly at prayer, persistently at work, pledged to the uttermost of duty and fearless of danger, trowel in hand and sword at girdle—this is the church militant. A willing people, dwelling at peace in a city protected by God's love as unbreached walls and battlements—with no use for sword or spear, for shield or habergeon—never hearing the taunt or alarum of a foe, happy and prosperous for ever—this is the church triumphant. And both are filled with such as Nehemiah's men.

READING THE LAW.

NEHEMIAH 8:1-12.

THE walls of Jerusalem were repaired, the gates were hung. For the first time in almost a century the people felt secure. They could lie down at night without the dread of being summoned by trumpet-blast to drive marauders from their streets. What a relief! The joy of the people must find expression in thanksgiving to God.

In the seventh month, the beginning of the civil year, a mass-meeting was held in the public square of Ophel, near the water gate, to celebrate the completion of the walls. It was a double holiday, January first and the Fourth of July in one. The people were there in a vast multitude; as it is written, "They gathered themselves together as one man to the street that was before the water gate."

The definite purpose for which they were assembled was to hear the reading of the Scriptures. The Book was not so common then as now. It was the work of laborious years to transcribe it. The authoritative copy in the sacred chest, if spared in the looting of the temple, had been sadly neglected. There were few opportunities of hearing it while they were toiling under the lash of Babylonish taskmasters. But now, in fresh remembrance of God's guiding and protecting providence, their hearts turned towards it. They longed to hear again "the Book of the Law." There was one man who might be able to gratify their longing—Ezra the scribe. He was a famous Biblical student, was called "the man of the Book." To him they naturally turned in this exigency. It is pleasant

to know that they were not spurred to this service by a divine injunction. Spontaneous devotion is the best thing this side of heaven. Ezra was as willing as he was competent to grant their desire. The Scriptures were the treasure of his heart. To him we probably owe the compilation of the Old Testament canon. It was now thirteen years since he had come to Jerusalem with a caravan of returning exiles, under a commission from Artaxerxes to appoint magistrates in Judæa. How he had employed himself since then we cannot say: but inasmuch as he was an adept in Scriptural study, we may venture the conjecture that he was divinely engaged in collecting the canonical books; and hence the popular request that he, as the best qualified of all, would "bring the Book of the Law."

There was an especial reason, apart from the gratitude of the people for recent providences, why the Scriptures should be restored at this time. The nation was now entering upon a new epoch. Out of the dust and ashes of a century it had arisen to newness of life. The Government of Israel was a theocracy; the Scriptures were its only constitution, its political as well as its doctrinal and moral code. What could be more appropriate on this New Year's day, at this celebration of the reestablishment, than a public reading of this great national symbol? It was something like our reading of the Declaration of Independence on Independence Day. And, if the truth were only recognized, the two symbols have much in common; for the Scriptures are the basis of our American jurisprudence, the real constitution of the Republic, the very blood and sinew of our body politic. A significant thing happened in the United States Senate during the debate as to an appropriation for the Colum-

bian Fair. In supporting a motion to condition the appropriation on the closing of the gates during the Sabbath, a leading senator—not generally known for his extreme Puritanism—sent to the Speaker's desk a Bible open at the Fourth Commandment. Thus tribute was paid incidentally to the authority of the Scriptures as our national "Book of the Law."

That was a memorable meeting by the water gate. A platform had been erected at a commanding point. This raised scaffold was large enough to accommodate a considerable number of speakers and high enough to be "above all the people." On it was seated Ezra, with thirteen priests and thirteen Levites to assist in the reading and expounding of the Scriptures. It must have been a most impressive sight. For seven days continuously probably not less than twenty-five thousand people gathered about that platform. They listened with an intense interest, breaking the silence only as they sobbed aloud when their hearts were pierced by the double-edged sword of truth or responded "Amen" in the service of prayer and praise.

The age in which we are living is preëminently an age of Bible study. There never was a period in the history of the world when so much and so earnest attention was given to God's Word. The Scriptures have been so multiplied as to be within the easy reach of every one. Multitudes of learned men are engaged in scrutinizing the volume from every standpoint and in every spirit. The sunlight of heaven and the lurid glare of brimstone are alike being thrown upon it. Experts in Biblical criticism are multiplying on every side. God be praised! But under such circumstances it is surely not unwise for God's people to inquire as to their proper attitude towards the

Book. And in this inquiry we may be helped by turning our eyes towards this great assembly that came together for Bible study in the square of Ophel more than two thousand years ago.

I. *Observe their reverent behavior.* The service was opened by Ezra with an ascription of praise. "All the people stood up." There were no listless or indifferent ones among them. They had been so long without the Word of God that their appetites were whetted. We are so familiar with it that possibly we are not as sensitive to its divineness as we should be. Able to buy a Bible for a quarter of a dollar, we are likely to prize it less than if it represented the value of a farm. Our familiarity induces a measure of indifference. The settlers of Arizona walked over their fields for years without knowing that untold treasures of precious ore lay just below the surface. Thus we treat our Bibles as we treat other books; but other books are mere pasture-land, while this is a gold-field. The investment of a sixpence in a New Testament has made many a beggar rich towards God.

We are frequently reminded in these days of the danger of bibliolatry, of making a fetich of the Scriptures, of worshipping the text. But the danger of our time lies not that way. Possibly there have been people who attached a superstitious importance to the mere paper and ink of Scripture; but it is better to err in the direction of superstition than in that of impiety. The Scotch mothers are said to have sometimes laid the Bible at the threshold of their cottage to keep the spooks and bogies away; better do that than treat the sacred Volume with any measure of disdain, to be an arrogant opposer or a heedless neglecter of the divine claims. Better kiss the Book than cut it with a penknife. (Jer. 36 : 23.)

The Bible is not like other books. To say that just criticism requires the student to dispossess himself of his conviction as to its divineness is to say that no Christian can be a Biblical critic. For every true Christian, whether a critic or not, must believe always and everywhere that the Bible is differentiated from all other volumes in being the inspired Word of God. When the scroll is opened he must "stand up." When he scrutinizes it his soul must be pervaded with a reverent recognition of its divine origin and character. This sort of criticism is highest of all. And this sort of Biblical study reveals the hid treasures of truth and brings the soul into close communion with God.

II. *Observe again that the people assembled by the water gate heard the Scriptures understandingly.* They were not recited to them in an unknown tongue. The priests and Levites "read in the Book distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." The Hebrew had passed out of common use; a majority of the people were probably unable to understand it. On this account the Scriptures as they were read before the assembly were translated sentence by sentence from the original into Aramaic, which was the vernacular tongue. Not only so; the reading was interspersed with expository addresses. During the recitation of the Scriptures the people stood in token of reverence; during the explanation of obscure words and passages, with practical observations as to belief and duty, they sat down. This was as it should be. There is a great gulf between the Word itself and the preacher's elucidation of it. The former is always, everywhere, absolutely true; the latter may be true or not.

A glimpse is here given into the true method of

preaching. All true preaching is expository, whether it follows the so-called "expository method" or not. The business of the preacher is to make known the divine will as to our creed and conduct; simply to bring Scripture into a clear light and to force it, through heart and conscience, into common life. To this end his preaching must first of all be plain. Many a pulpit candle has been extinguished by a sesquipedalian word. Christ himself told the sublimest truths in very simple phrases. There are some churches in which it would be extremely difficult to enter the kingdom as a little child. Possibly this is one reason why we have to speak of "the lapsed masses" and the "unchurched multitudes." The people want to hear God's truth so presented that they can understand it. If there is a way of deliverance from sin they would be glad to learn about it. But when they come to church and hear learned disquisitions on everything else but salvation and the vital truths that radiate from it, they are naturally disappointed. There may be vocal gymnastics in the choir-loft and oratorical pyrotechnics in the pulpit; but these were not what they came for. And if, when the next bell rings, they pass by on the other side, our false homiletical methods are largely to blame for it. God's Word, his plan of salvation, his code of morals, his unveiling of himself, this is what the people want. The gospel has lost none of its magnetic power. Christ is now as always the great lode-stone. "I, if I be lifted up," said he, "will draw all men unto me."

III. *Observe furthermore that the people at the water gate heard the Scriptures to some effect.* There are occasions when it seems as if the presentation of God's Word were like the pouring of water upon the ground; but in this instance there were remarkable and immediate results.

The hearts and consciences of the people were so touched that they "all wept." They saw their sins and shortcomings as if reflected in a mirror. Alas, year after year they had blindly done despite to this holy Law. Was there hope for them? Ay, the Word bruises only that it may heal. "Go your way," said their preachers, "neither be ye grieved; for the joy of the Lord is your strength!" In the course of that assembly the way of pardon was doubtless so clearly opened up before them that they went away with the song of salvation upon their lips. The Law was full of Christ; its types and symbols all pointed to him; and the joy of the Lord is in throwing our sinful selves upon the bosom of his love. "In hym ye ben fylled," is the Wycliffe version of a most gracious promise. He is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption; and the Law is a schoolmaster to lead us to him.

Such was the immediate effect of this memorable service. Nor was it transient, like a gracious dew that vanishes before the sun. The Feast of Tabernacles was at hand; the people entered upon its festivities with gladness of heart. Never had they sung with so much unction, "Praise the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever!" They ate the fat and drank the sweet and sent portions to the needy. Two days after this festival came a solemn fast, when they formally annulled all pagan alliances and renewed their covenant with God.

This was a revival worthy of the name. There were conversions *en masse*, the whole nation turning from their sins to truth and righteousness. Sinners were saved; saints were edified; all Israel was brought upon a higher plane of life. A true revival can have no other origin than the Scriptures. God speaks through them to the hearts

and consciences of men and nations. In them sin is revealed as the destroyer and Christ as the Saviour. They are that sword of the Spirit which in the hand of a devoted church is destined to subjugate the nations and make all souls prisoners of hope.

Blessed Bible! Old-fashioned but not obsolete; deep beyond the plummet of philosophy, yet clear enough to reveal thy deepest treasures to children's eyes; sharp as a Damascus blade to pierce a guilty conscience, but comforting as balm of Gilead to the wounds of the penitent; fierce as the lightning against all wrong and error, but gentle as a mother's touch in time of trouble! Dear Book that our fathers touched with reverent hands and pressed with loving lips, thou shalt be the man of our counsel also, a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our way. In sorrow we will find thy solace through our tears; in weariness we will drink from thy crystal depths as soldiers at a wayside fountain; in weakness we will gird our loins with thine exceeding great and precious promises as with a girdle; and in our last journey thy living Word shall be our rod and staff to lean upon until we come to heaven's gate!

KEEPING THE SABBATH.

NEHEMIAH 13:15-22.

THE restoration of the ruined walls of Jerusalem was appropriately celebrated by a seven-days' festival, at the conclusion of which the people solemnly renewed their covenant with God. Its preamble was as follows: "In view of the many mercies and kindnesses of Jehovah we do make a sure covenant and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests do set their seal unto it" (Neh. 9:38). In that covenant they promise (1) in general terms "to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord," and (2) particularly to make no alliance by intermarriage with the neighboring tribes, (3) to desist from labor on the Sabbath day, (4) and to support the temple service with generous contributions, the concluding words of the instrument being, "We will not forsake the house of our God."

But the Israelites were ever a fickle people. Their devotion was beautiful while it lasted; but it was evanescent as the brilliant gates that bar the sunset heavens or as foam upon the billows. For eleven years, while Nehemiah remained in Jerusalem, all went well. Then (B. C. 433) he returned to Persia; and at once the Israelites, like children when their mothers are away, began their misdoings. The tithes were neglected or refused. Pagan marriages were contracted. A Tyrian colony was permitted to establish itself within the confines of the city. That miserable apostate, Tobiah the Ammonite, was allowed to occupy an apartment in the temple. And naturally with this introduction of foreign influence came

encroachments on the Sabbath law. The Phœnicians and other aliens in Jerusalem observed their own customs, just as some of the German-Americans in our time insist on beer-gardens and other usages of "the Continental Sunday." This was the entering wedge. The Jews themselves were soon enticed into unholy work and pleasure ; and the Sabbath was like a garden with its hedge removed and its beds of fragrance trampled by heedless feet.

After ten years' absence Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem and found affairs in sad condition. But the man who had rebuilt four miles of ruined wall in the face of the enemy in fifty-two days was not the man to be disheartened now. He at once ordered the prompt payment of the tithe, thrust Tobiah out of the sacred precincts of the temple and caused them to be thoroughly cleansed, required a general attendance at divine worship, reorganized the Levitical courses, and then turned his attention to Sabbath Reform.

The desecration of the Sabbath was one of Israel's besetting sins. It had again and again brought them under the divine displeasure. It was for this specifically that God had permitted them to be carried away into a captivity of seventy years. Their Scriptures were full of admonitions respecting it. Their experience should have taught them better than to err again in this direction : yet here they were, floundering in the same slough that had so often mired them.

To reform this evil was the most difficult part of Nehemiah's work, it had entrenched itself so deeply. The Phœnicians, a great commercial people who were without a Sabbath, had gained a strong influence in Jerusalem. They kept their booths open and crowded the gateways with their traffic on the holy day.

The first thing Nehemiah did was to "contend with the nobles" or Jewish aristocracy. He knew very well that the greater part of the responsibility lay at their doors. It was their trade that kept the marts open; it was their tables that supported the fish-sellers from Tyre. Were they to hold aloof, the alien Sabbath-breakers would fail for want of patronage. The same is true in our time. The Sunday newspaper would be a losing venture if Church members were to withhold their subscriptions and Christian merchants their advertisements. Meat-markets and barber-shops and ice-cream restaurants would have to close their doors if all who profess to believe in God's Sabbath were to pass them by. Limp, boneless piety is at the bottom of this business. The reform will never come until "the nobles" begin to believe in their own covenant. Judgment must begin at the house of God.

The next step that Jeremiah took was to enforce the law. No doubt there were many in Israel who regarded it as a dead letter, a remnant of the Puritanism of former days. And no doubt there were others who questioned the wisdom of this step on the ground that "you can't make men moral by law." Nehemiah believed in suasion, too; it was for this reason that he began by remonstrating with the nobles. But he knew that law is suasion's best friend and co-laborer; wherefore he "commanded that the gates should be shut and charged that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath." This closed the markets, which were in the open spaces about the gates. It was simply an effort to enforce the statutes. There is scarcely a city or town in the United States where due respect is paid to enactments pertaining to the holy day. By this default the sanctity of all law passes into disrepute. If the statutes are wrong, repeal them; if right, enforce

them. The responsibility falls on every upright citizen. Three men of vertebral conviction and courage can work wonders in any community. The easy way is to sit with folded hands while the Phœnicians are selling their wares in the gateways; but the righteous way is to brave all opposition and cavilling in an earnest endeavor to shut the gates. Let every man of God lend his utmost influence to enforce all salutary measures for the public welfare and promote a general regard for the sanctity of law.

A further step was taken by Nehemiah. When the foreign merchants undertook to evade his prohibition by lodging outside the walls and disposing of their commodities to such as went out, he warned them that on a repetition of this offence he "would lay hands on them." Some magistrates would have rested with a proclamation; he proposed to enforce it. The reason why "prohibition does n't prohibit," that is, absolutely eradicate the liquor-traffic within its reach, is because there are magistrates who do not hesitate to forswear themselves as co-parceners with law-breakers. In such cases the recreant officer is morally a deeper-dyed criminal than the rumseller whom he protects. The weakness which hesitates and parleys under such conditions is a crime. If the man in Nehemiah's place cannot stop the illicit traffic at the gates, he had better go back to Persia. Let him give place to an abler and more courageous man.

One thing more Nehemiah did: not satisfied with a temporary betterment, he took measures to perpetuate the reform. The gates were to be closed permanently. To this end the Levites were required to cleanse themselves and assume thenceforth as one of their sacred functions "the keeping of the gates and sanctifying of the Sabbath day." One reason why so many reform movements fail

is because they are undertaken on impulse, carried on with a hurrah, and suffered to lapse presently into desuetude. They die of heart failure. For want of plan and organization and *sacramentum* they go the way of all effervescent uprisings.

It is much to be feared that the laxity of Christians in our time with respect to Sabbath observance and the enforcement of Sabbath laws is due in large measure to a misapprehension of the importance of the Sabbath itself. We must thoroughly believe in the Sabbath if we would keep it ourselves or induce others to. We may profitably, therefore, by way of *practical application*, offer at this point a brief *resumé* of the considerations which underlie the duty of Sabbath rest.

First. The institution of the Sabbath is coeval with the race. Adam in Paradise kept the holy day. This is evidenced by the primitive division of time into weeks. The word "remember" in the Fourth Commandment shows that this injunction was but the revival and reëmphasing of one which had all along been binding upon men.

Second. The duty of Sabbath observance is based upon a ground which in the nature of the case makes it perpetual. "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and rested on the seventh day ; *wherefore* the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." There could be, therefore, no abrogation of this ordinance. When it ceases to be true that God rested on the Sabbath, then, and not before, we may feel absolved from the duty of desisting from all labor on that day.

Third. The Sabbath law was interwoven with the nerves and sinews of the human constitution before it was inscribed on the tables of stone. Were there no Deca-

logue the Sabbath must still be observed, because it rests in hygienic principles. The man who presumes to toil seven days uninterruptedly in every week pays the penalty of a violation of nature in pains and weaknesses and premature decay. A committee appointed by the English House of Commons to investigate the economy of Sabbath rest reported that after a patient examination of all available statistics they were convinced that men and beasts toiling six days in the week are healthier, live longer, and do more and better work than such as labor during the whole seven days. There are multitudes of men who, by disregard of the natural law of the Sabbath, are loading themselves down with burdens, physical pains and punishments, of which they can never be rid. The French nation is at this moment groaning under a burden greater than it can bear. The workingmen of France, who thought it harmless to introduce a reign of Sunday pleasure, are now doing seven days' work for six days' wages and are vainly clamoring for a restoration of Sabbath rest. Nature is a hard taskmaster. God forgives, but nature knows no mercy. Men and nations inevitably pay the penalty for violating nature's laws.

Fourth. The injunction, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," when placed in the Decalogue received the formal sanction of Jehovah as an essential part of the moral law. The ceremonial law of rights and symbols, being a system of "shadows of good things to come," could be fulfilled and so disannulled. But the moral law, being ingrained in the constitution of the race and fortified by the divine sanction, can never be revoked or abrogated. To make this manifest it was written on tables of stone.

Fifth. Christ came to fulfil the ceremonial law; at

his coming it vanished as shadows do before the sun. But as to the moral law, he came to fasten it more and more permanently on the hearts and consciences of men. He cleared away the traditions with which the Pharisees had overlaid the Commandment and restored it to its original binding simplicity. He said, "The Sabbath was made for man," not to burden and tyrannize over him, but to serve his bodily and spiritual welfare. The tree thus restored shall bear fruit for ever ; and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Sixth. The change from the seventh to the first day was in no wise a violation of the original injunction, but rather in pursuance of it. One-seventh of man's time was still sacredly devoted to rest, and a new and living branch of joy was engrafted upon it. The resurrection of Christ was the end of a new creation.

"'T was great to call a world from naught ;

'T was greater to redeem."

The Creator who after bringing into existence the visible things of the universe rested on the seventh day and hallowed it was the same who afterwards by his vicarious anguish delivered the world from death. It was a wearisome task. As the worn sufferer looked back from his cross upon the six days' heat and burden, he said with a profound sense of relief, "It is finished ;" and then, as on the seventh primeval morning, he "entered into his rest." It is the Saviour's and Creator's rest in one—the end of the first and second creations—that we celebrate in the observance of the Lord's day.

These things being so, it is obvious that thoughtful and right-minded people should lend no countenance to those who favor the removal of Sabbath landmarks. This is the day of all days for climbing to the heights of

vision above the mists and miasms of sordid life to look away on things eternal and let the soul quaff deep and glorious breaths of celestial air. At the best our spiritual natures are too much left to starve and shrivel for want of proper nourishment. The Sabbath calls us into the King's garden and bids us eat and drink abundantly.

“Oft when the world with iron hands
Has bound me in its six days' chain,
This bursts them, like the strong man's bands,
And lets my spirit loose again.”

This is the day preëminently for meditation in the great verities, for sanctuary service and the communings of the trysting-place, for the reading of God's Word, for the enjoyment of the sweet sanctities of domestic life, for the home altar where

“In the circle wide
The sire turns o'er wi' patriarchal grace
The big ha' Bible.”

The life of this world never comes so near to heaven as in a well-kept Sabbath. Then, as quaint George Herbert sings,

“Heaven's gates are ope ;
Blessings are plentiful and rife,
More plentiful than hope.”

ESTHER BEFORE THE KING.

ESTHER 4:10-17; 5:1-3.

HERE is a dramatic episode in the history of the Captivity. The scene is Shushan, the winter capital of Persia, about B. C. 747. The *dramatis personæ* are as follows:

1. *Xerxes the Great*; here called Ahasuerus, which is merely a title meaning "the king." Some years before this he had divorced his queen, Vashti, for refusing to appear and exhibit her beauty at one of his magnificent revels. He was proud, self-willed, arrogant, profligate of human life. On his way to the Grecian war an old man begged that he would spare from the conscription the eldest of his five sons; whereupon he caused the son to be slain before the father's eyes, cut the body asunder, and, placing the parts on either side of the road, marched his army between them. Yet he was possessed of splendid courage and was not wholly without magnanimity.

2. *Esther, his queen*; meaning "a star." Her former Jewish name was Hadassah, "the myrtle." She was an orphan of the tribe of Benjamin. Her grandfather had been among the captives whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away to Babylon, B. C. 598. She had been chosen for her extraordinary beauty to succeed the unfortunate Vashti, and had preserved her ancestral faith and purity of character amid the excesses of the pagan court.

3. *Haman "the magnificent,"* the king's Grand Vizier. He was arrogant and ambitious to the last degree. When he passed along the streets the people were required to prostrate themselves before him.

4. *Mordecai*; an old Jew, uncle and guardian of Esther; loyal to his religion and fearless in defending it. He offended Haman by refusing to bow down before him. He would not "crook the pregnant hinges of the knee that thrift might follow fawning." For this the Grand Vizier proposed a consummate revenge. To kill the old Jew would be a slight matter; he would exterminate the whole noxious brood. On payment of ten thousand talents of silver he secured the privilege of destroying them in every portion of the realm. The edict was issued and the fatal day appointed by lot, the thirteenth day of the eleventh month, giving the fated people a respite of eleven months. During this period the aged Mordecai labored to avert the threatened calamity.

5. *Hatach*; an officer in attendance on Queen Esther and a go-between in her communications with Mordecai. It was the latter's purpose to thwart the execution of the decree for the massacre; and in doing so he must secure the coöperation of Esther, and Hatach was induced to carry messages between them. To Mordecai's appeal that Esther would "go in unto the king" in behalf of her people she replied that she dared not. To enter the king's presence at any time uninvited was certain death unless he should be pleased to extend his sceptre. She dared not venture. He was then feasting with his nobles, and for thirty days she had not seen him. To intrude upon him under such circumstances would be to challenge danger. Mordecai replied that she could not afford to wait. If she refused to intercede for them God would deliver them in some other way, but she and her father's house would suffer. A glorious opportunity was hers. "Who knoweth," said he, "whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" By this entreaty the

queen was persuaded. Mordecai and all the Jews that were in Shushan must fast and pray for her. "So," said she, "firm in purpose and strengthened by prayer, will I go in unto the king; and if I perish, I perish!" and Mordecai, glad and hopeful, "went his way and did all that Esther had commanded him."

The momentous day had come. The king sat feasting with his courtiers in the great banquet-hall. A guard of Nubians kept watch before the gates. They saw along the marble walk a form approaching. They whispered to each other in amazement. Nearer she came and lifted her veil; it was the queen! Never had she seemed so beautiful, never so gorgeously apparelled. She paused for a moment at the threshold; her eyes fell and her lips moved silently; then she advanced to meet her doom. A moment later she stood in presence of her haughty consort and his splendid company. The eyes of the banqueters were lifted languidly, then filled with sudden light, as when one, rising from sleep, draws a curtain towards the sunrise, and silence fell upon all. Pale but resolute she advanced towards the king. He looked upon her, and the vision of her beauty mastered him. The sceptre was stretched forth. "What wilt thou, Queen Esther, and what is thy request?" The crisis was over. Israel was saved!

In this dramatic episode we may learn *the Glory of Intercession*. For the human race is under the death sentence as veritably as was Israel; and it behooves every earnest man to do his utmost to deliver it. The edict of retributive justice has gone forth; swift heralds have carried it to the remotest parts of the earth: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." None but the King of kings can save; and no power but prayer can reach him. The

atonement of Jesus Christ has made pardon possible, and his intercession has opened the way for all intercessors to the throne of the heavenly grace. Who now will, in behalf of perishing souls, go in unto the King?

First, for our encouragement let us observe again the bowed form of this suppliant queen. Never had she seemed so beautiful as now. To bend the knees for others is the noblest attitude possible to the children of men.

It is possible for us to be saved alone. Esther might have begged for personal deliverance and left her people to their doom; but it would have been more noble to die with them. What then shall be said of the selfish pietist who prays, "Forgive us our trespasses," and gives no heed to the multitudes who lie in darkness and the shadow of death? What shall be said of those Christians who "do n't believe in missions"? God forgive them for their sin! When the ship "Algona" went down and the captain made off with one of the boats, leaving forty-eight passengers to drown, the whole world stood in horror of him. It is far better to sing, "Rescue the perishing," than to make too much of "When I can read my title clear."

It is possible for us to convert souls. Regeneration is God's prerogative, but conversion is for us. We convert sinners when we bring them to God for regeneration. It is written, "He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5: 20). And again, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12: 3). A glorious reward awaits those who in self-forgetfulness have adventured all in behalf of their fellow-men.

Second, observe the outstretched sceptre. It means to us that the great King is ever willing and glad to hear intercessory prayer. Moses was at his best when pleading, "Oh this people have sinned a great sin. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive them—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book!" And Hezekiah, when he spread the letter of Sennacherib before the altar and besought the Lord to save the nation. And Paul when he protested, "I could wish myself accursed for my kinsmen!"

In the rabbinical legend of Sandalphon an angel is represented as standing at the outermost gates of heaven, one foot on a ladder of light. He is listening for a mother's appeal, the sob of a burdened heart, the cry "God be merciful to him!" On hearing these voices of intercession he bears them aloft, and they turn to garlands as he lays them before the feet of God.

It stands in the nature of the case that God should be most willing to hear unselfish prayers. Strange that we should expect him to hearken when we plead for ourselves and have so little confidence when we supplicate for others! He has compassed the intercessor about with exceeding great and precious promises. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much; it saveth the sick so that the Lord shall raise him up, and if he hath committed sins they shall be forgiven him (Jas. 5:15). "I will therefore," says Paul, "that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made (not for yourselves alone but) for all men" (1 Tim. 2:1).

This was the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Himself the great Intercessor, he never once denied a prayer for a loved one. He rose from the feast to follow Jairus to his daughter's bed. How readily he responded to the appeal

of the father of the demoniac boy, "Oh if thou canst do anything, have compassion upon us!" The importunity of the Syrophœnician woman in her child's behalf was a pleasure to him. Every day he is saying to many an intercessory suppliant, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Third, let us observe the sequel. The Jews who had been under sentence of death were now feasting in their houses. The body of Haman was hanging on the gallows which he had built for Mordecai; and the latter, arrayed in royal apparel of blue and white, was "great in the king's house." The Feast of Purim, instituted in recognition of this deliverance, is observed to this day among the scattered Jews.

The most gladsome heart in Israel at that time was doubtless that of the beautiful queen. There is no joy like "the generous pleasure of kindness." This indeed is that "joy of the Lord" into which believers enter at heaven's gate. The life of Jesus, like a brimming cup, was full of it. "I have meat to eat," said he at Jacob's well, "that ye know not of." He had been pointing a sinful woman to truth and righteousness. Such deeds were his delight, his very meat and drink (John 4: 31-36).

In this direction lies the shortest and most direct route to assurance. In doing for others we most clearly discern the reality of what the good Lord has done for us. The best proof that the husbandman cares for his fig-tree is when the wayfarer pauses to satisfy his hunger with its fruit. What was it that healed Job's infirmity? Not his vain meditations on the mysteries of Providence, and surely not the well-meant but mistaken sympathy of his comforters. But when sitting in pain among the ruins of his prosperity he forgot himself and prayed for those who

had misunderstood and misrepresented him, then God turned his captivity and "gave him twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

The world waits to be won by Christian intercession. Men yield to the divine overtures when they understand that others are praying for them. When Gen. Grant was languishing on his painful bed he received many messages of sympathy, but none that touched him so deeply as this from an aged Quaker: "Friend Grant, I am a stranger to thee. I would not intrude upon thy suffering, but *I am anxious for thy soul*. Trust in Jesus; he will not fail thee." Oh for the day when all God's people shall be prayerfully anxious for souls!

Furthermore, the abundant entrance into heaven is for such as, by prayer and its supplementary effort, have wrought deliverance for others. At the close of our Civil War, when Abraham Lincoln went down to Richmond, the freedmen loosed the horses from his carriage and dragged it through the streets, shouting, "God bless Massa Lincoln!" He had broken their chains, and this was but a slight expression of the gratitude which they felt towards him. But what a welcome awaits the faithful minister, teacher, parent at the threshold of the celestial city! And what a joy to be thus welcomed to the everlasting habitations! The most honorable award that was given by ancient Rome for noble deeds was a simple tablet on which was inscribed, *Ob civem salvatum*, "For saving a comrade's life." This was reckoned a more illustrious deed than breaking through the ranks of the enemy or planting the standard on the ramparts of a beleaguered city. In the apportionment of the honors of heaven there is nothing comparable with this, "He hath saved a soul from death!" The one who earns that plau-

dit is welcomed by the great Intercessor himself and enters triumphantly into the joy of his Lord.

Let us therefore in behalf of others come with holy boldness to the mercy-seat. The way is open. No armed sentinels guard the way. Dr. Johnson was once kept waiting four hours in the hallway of the English king. God keeps no suppliant waiting; and the moment we draw nigh his sceptre is stretched out. We sometimes sing,

“ I ’ll to the gracious King approach
Whose sceptre pardon gives ;
Perhaps he will command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives !

“ Perhaps he will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer ;
But if I perish I will go
And perish only there !”

In the interest of faith and truth let us revise the old hymn and make it read on this wise :

“ I know he will admit my plea,
I know he ’ll hear my prayer ;
I cannot perish if I go,
I cannot perish there !”

And if this holds true of one who supplicates for himself, much truer is it of the intercessor. Wherefore let us plead for others, for the poor and suffering, for those that dwell in the shadows of death, for kinsfolk and acquaintances, and for such as are afar off. God will hear and answer, and souls born out of our intercessory travail shall be as stars in our crowns of rejoicing for ever and ever !

THE AFFLICTIONS OF JOB.

JOB 2:1-10.

As a subject of critical and literary study the book of Job is almost unsurpassed. The fact that it contains more unique words than any other book of the Old Testament makes it a fascinating field for the linguist. It is to him what Borneo with its unclassified insects and plants was to the boy-naturalist. To the *litterateur* it takes its place alongside the "Divina Commedia," "Faust," and "Paradise Lost." Carlyle, in a famous passage in his essay on Mohammed, says, "I call the book of Job one of the grandest things ever written with pen. One feels indeed as if it were not Hebrew, such a noble universality, different from noble patriotism or sectarianism, reigns in it. A noble book, all men's book. . . . There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit." Froude says that it is "a book which will one day, perhaps, when it is allowed to stand on its own merits, be seen towering up alone far above all the poetry of the world." But the book of Job has the greatest value to the religious philosopher, for it offers an exhaustive treatment by an inspired penman of the problem of suffering. The literary form of the book is poetical and dramatic. It is not a drama, strictly speaking, for the Hebrews had no stage. But it is in the form of rhythmical dialogue. In language of the most stately and beautiful kind there is set before us THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE. There are five parts: (a) The prose prologue, showing that God permits Job to be tried for the proving of his faith (ch. 1, 2). (b) The arguments of the three friends, with Job's replies. The

reasons which might be alleged for Job's sufferings are offered and shown to be unsatisfactory (ch. 3-31). (c) The discourses of Elihu, which are an exalted expansion of the arguments of the three friends, but contribute nothing satisfactory to the solution of the problem why suffering comes upon the good man (ch. 32-37). (d) Jehovah's reply to Job. He grants no solution of the problem. His reply to Job's questionings is a revelation of his majesty (ch. 38-42:6). (e) The prose epilogue, showing how, because of his faith in God, in spite of the problem of his suffering remaining unsolved, Job's prosperity and happiness are restored (ch. 42:7-17). The prologue and epilogue show us that with God there is no mystery about the sufferings of the righteous: they are permitted to suffer for the proving of their faith. But Job does not find any solution of his sufferings from his point of view. They remain to him unexplained. Providence is still a mystery to him. But he is enabled to have faith in God just the same, and by the restoration of his prosperity God's approval of his attitude is shown. So we are taught that while the workings of Providence are a mystery, still the right condition of mind for man is humble faith, which God accepts and honors. Thus we find that the Old Testament points us to that which we are tempted to think to be pretty nearly the exclusive teaching of the New Testament: the virtue of faith.

The lesson before us is a part of the prologue of the book. Job is introduced, and his character and prosperity are described (1:1-5). Then the origin of the trial of Job's faith is shown in the councils of heaven, where Satan, "that one of God's ministers whose office is to try the sincerity of men," insinuates that Job's faith is mercenary, that any one who is prosperous can have faith, and is met

with permission from Jehovah to try Job's faith by suffering (vv. 6-12). There follows the account of the loss of Job's herds and flocks, servants, house, and children, through all of which Job's faith remained unshaken (vv. 13-22). Our lesson follows, telling how permission was given by Jehovah to try Job still further by intense bodily suffering. And we see Job coming through it with confidence in God unabated. We are able now to see that our passage is but one step in the development of a sublime moral lesson. But it has nevertheless a certain completeness of its own. We can learn from it (a) a lesson about the character of temptation, and (b) a lesson about bearing temptation.

(a) *Temptation.*

1. God is not the author of it. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand" (v. 6). If any temptation be analyzed into its elements, it will be found to have three parts: first, the external conditions which tend to bring it about; for instance, being brought into a place where the temptation exists (like Christ, who was led by the Spirit into the foodless desert), or being exposed to physical suffering (like Paul, 2 Cor. 12:7). God may be the author of these conditions. We pray that if it be his will he will not lead us into temptation. But he may see fit to do so (as in the case of Christ). Or Satan may be the author of these conditions (as in Paul's and Job's cases). Second, there is the state of heart which makes temptation tempting to us. God is not the author of this (Jas. 1:13, 14). Third, there is the special thought in the mind, the suggestion to do the deed, which is the focusing of the preëxisting and undeveloped feelings of the heart. Satan is the author of this. In the book of Job the malignancy of his character is not as fully por-

trayed as elsewhere. But when he brought pain to bear upon Job we cannot but think that he suggested to Job the thought of denying God and giving up his faith. God sometimes leads us into places and circumstances where temptation exists, but he does not suggest the thought of sin to us nor give us the desire to yield to it which constitute the temptation. Hence he is not the author of temptation.

2. But he permits us to be tempted. He allows natural laws to work about us, and historical events to shape themselves, and persons and things to come into contact with us, in such ways that temptation arises. He said of Job to Satan, "Behold, he is in thine hand" (ver. 6). He granted leave for great bodily suffering to come upon Job. This bodily suffering would tend to make Job waver in his faith, because, conscious of an honest endeavor to do right, he would not be able to understand why God permitted the affliction to come upon him. It is not always the case that God immediately sends suffering or immediately leads us where we shall be exposed to it. But whenever it comes it is always and invariably with his full permission. To say anything else would be to say that God in certain cases loses control of events, which is an impossible supposition. Nothing escapes him. All things are naked and opened before his eyes. Whatever is, is by his permission. There is nothing going on which he does not see and which he could not check in a moment if he chose. But he has permitted good men always to be exposed to sufferings that had in them the possibility of temptation. Indeed, what man ever lived that he did not permit to be so exposed? He scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. To expect to be free from trial is to expect to be dehumanized.

3. God permits temptation for our good. In our lesson we see that it was permitted in Job's case in order to bring out clearly the stability of his faith in God. Fire is indispensable to the purifying of the gold. Therefore we are told to "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" (Jas. 1:2). It is true that James is referring to tribulations for Christ's sake. But the word is the common word for temptation (see 1 Tim. 6:9). And would not these tribulations tend to lead to the weakening of faith and so to sin? Tribulation is not synonymous with temptation, but it tends to become so in experience. So when we are inclined to feel that God permits tribulation but to question whether he permits temptation, we are wrong, for there is no great difference between the two. He lets them come; he lets temptation come, open-eyed, but not for naught. God is not careless or thoughtless in his permission of our trial. He is fully cognizant of every step in its oncoming. Does not this fact, combined with our knowledge that he is a God of love, lead us to the necessary conclusion that it must be for our good that he lets us be tempted? To think anything else would be irrational. We do not see how it is for our good any more than Job did. But our function Godward in this life is not seeing, but believing without seeing. We walk by faith, not by sight.

4. Our friends sometimes unwittingly make temptation harder to us. Job's wife (ver. 9) spoke to him in sympathy. "Renounce God and die [for that is the only thing remaining to you]," is not a fling of sarcasm, but a weak but honest attempt to give comfort. Her advice was not good, but it was advice. She was not trying to show hostility. "Her story, however, is not told for her sake, but to show how those around Job fell away, and to

set in a strong light the strain to which his faith was put by such an example and the solicitations that accompanied it." (Davidson.) Sometimes the hardest thing about being tempted is that the temptation comes through some one whom we love. Friends do not always know how they lend themselves to putting strain upon our character. Adam's temptation came through the one closest to him. Job's temptation to lose faith was put into definite form by his wife. Shakespeare may have been unconsciously reflecting the same thought when he made Lady Macbeth the instrument for the crystallization of Macbeth's desires into the definite form of crime. If a stranger suggested a wrong to us we would repudiate it. But when a friend suggests it, affection is very apt to serve as an over-successful disguise. We do not always see the wrongness of evil, because it comes to us not under the title of sin, but under the name of friendship or some other good thing (2 Cor. 11: 14).

5. But temptation is never necessarily successful. It was not so in Job's case. Let it do its utmost with us, still the integrity of the power of the soul is not in the least affected. Above all solicitations without, above all tendencies to yield within, the will sits enthroned with a free sceptre. No external force nor internal inclination can compel the will either way. Suffering could not compel Job to renounce God, though it might compel him to die. We sometimes hear men say of a criminal, "Poor fellow, he could n't help it." The sense of human sympathy and pity is worthy of praise. But its expression would make the criminal beneath human sympathy, for it would make him less than a man by denying to him any freedom of will. Fatalism is the lowest degradation of man. It is a falsehood. No man must sin. For every man has a will,

and every man has access to a will stronger than his own which is waiting to work in him resistance to evil. 1 Cor. 10: 13.

(b) *Bearing temptation.*

Job's example gives us some very practical lessons.

1. We see the solitude of the tempted soul. Job's wife, the one who ought most fully to have understood him, is seen to be antagonistic to his state of heart. He wanted help in resisting temptation; she, on the contrary, tended to make him yield to it. And so he must stand alone to fight his great battle. How awful is the solitude of the human soul! Even if they are on the right side in the struggle against sin, parents, friends, brothers cannot enter upon our field of battle. The barriers of the soul cannot be passed. There alone we each must confront temptation and have our fight with it. And yet we are not alone there. God is with us, and not as a spectator merely, but as a helper. He can do what man cannot do: he can penetrate into the human heart and give it grace. Why did Job resist sin and hold fast by his faith? Because God was helping him even when he did not feel it and had almost ceased to believe it. It is dreadful to think how alone we often are in our interior life so far as friends are concerned. But that loneliness is relieved by the presence of God.

2. Job rightly says to his wife that to renounce God would be foolish (v. 10). It would be foolish because one ought not to take such an intensely important step without having everything so clearly before him that there could be no doubt that such a step was the only reasonable one. But Job was in complete mystery. He did not know by any means that the circumstances were such as ought to have legitimately led to that end. The pro-

logue shows us that the circumstances which were hidden from Job, if known to him, would certainly have led him to be faithful to God. He would have made a tremendous mistake if he had felt that he was sure that the only rational thing to do was to give up God. There was much he did not know. The atheist assumes that he is omniscient. Moreover if Job had renounced God he would have been irrational because he would have given up the only source of help possible. To be sure it seemed as though God did not intend to help him. But it would have been most foolish to assume that what seemed to be so was so, when that involved abandoning the only possible hope. If God did not help Job no one could. He was not sure that God would not help him. When a man is drowning and there is hope only in the possibility of his catching one life-line, it would be foolish for him to abandon the chance of getting hold of it because safety by means of it was only hypothetical. If a man has no hope except in a guess, he had better hold fast to that guess. It is infinitely better than nothing at all.

3. Job shows us that faith is the only reasonable attitude of man towards God. "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (v. 10). Is God sovereign of the universe and of ourselves? Yes. Has he not a right then to send us what he will? Surely. And has he not the right to keep from us the understanding of his ways of working with us without being exposed to the insinuation that he has ceased to love us? Certainly. And has he not a right still to our faith, when we cannot understand his working? Yes, says Job. Notice that Job means not only that God has a right as sovereign Creator to do what

he will with his creatures, but that doing what he will with them, he is still reasonably entitled to faith from them. The question is not whether God has a right to afflict, but whether, afflicting, he has a right still to our trust. Job shows us by example that He has, and that it is possible for us to give it. Indeed it would be an odd kind of faith which exacted of God an understanding of all his ways. That would not be faith but knowledge. That such faith as Job's is not impossible is shown by the example of Sir Walter Scott. When he found himself a bankrupt through no fault of his own, he did not curse his fate or wonder whether there were a God, but he quietly submitted to the lot which had come upon him and copied these words of Job into his diary. No man can see into the mystery of God's providence; but the man who has faith is able to get along without seeing. And it can be a source of joy to him that his attitude towards God is just that which is most reasonable in a finite mind towards that which is infinite.

4. Good comes, although we do not see it, out of our temptations. "In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (v. 10). That gives to us only the negative result. But underneath that there was the positive result of new strength of character. Job in prosperity might be accused of a mercenary faith, and it could not be disproven. But Job was richer in as far as accomplishment is more than the possibility of accomplishment. To be able to trust God in trouble is not as much as to actually do so. And this accomplishment, like every moral accomplishment meant to Job an accretion of moral strength. He was a greater man after trial than before.

AFFLICTIONS SANCTIFIED.

JOB 5:17-27.

As there is one dominating thought in the book of Job, and all things in the book take their place in the development of that thought, it would be wholly unfair, not to say dangerous, to study any single passage without fixing its relation to the whole.

We are to remember always that the purpose of the book is to point to the fact that God's ways of dealing with his people are mysterious. The reason of the sufferings of the righteous is to bring out some special excellence of character plainly seen by God, but veiled from the afflicted soul. There are other partial explanations of sorrow, true as far as they go, but not sufficient always. The great debate between Job and his friends (chap. 4-31) brings out some of these partial explanations, but Job shows that they are not fully satisfactory in his case (i. e., the case of a righteous man). The lesson before us is a portion of one of these partial explanations. It is true, yet it is not the whole truth concerning suffering. Of the three cycles of speeches (chap. 4-14, 15-21, 22-31) our passage belongs to the first. Eliphaz, the speaker, takes the position of one who has special insight into divine truth. As such he expresses wonder at Job's despair (chap. 4:1-11), he objects to Job's murmurings (chap. 4:12-5:7), and he asserts that suffering is God's way of correcting his children (5:8-27).

I. He touches first upon the facts in the matter.

1. The chief fact before him is that suffering is real. The reality of it is the very substructure of his thought.

To demonstrate that there is suffering would have been an utterly absurd proceeding in his eyes, especially there in the presence of the hideously and excruciatingly suffering Job. It is not well for us to brood over sorrows. Even if they are genuine they are not all that is genuine in life. On the other hand it is not well for us to deal with them by shutting our eyes to them. The ostrich's danger is not removed by his burying his head in the sand. There is a morbid introspectiveness, an unhealthy abandonment of the mind to the depression of grief. There is also a manly courageous facing of the question of suffering, both in general and in our special individual circumstances, which tends to a rational understanding of it and to the good health of the soul. That vagary of thought known to-day as Christian Science attempts to deal with the matter of pain, death, and sorrow by denying their existence. But a large part of the Scripture is occupied with the trials of life. If trials are imaginary why these Scriptures? Moreover if suffering is imaginary Christ did not really die for us and we are yet in our sins. But those who suffer (and who of us does not?) do not need to be argued into belief in the reality of suffering. Pain is here, a colossal, awful fact.

2. Another fact patent to Eliphaz was that suffering comes from God (v. 17). It is "the chastening of the Almighty." In Job's case, to be sure, the suffering was the immediate work of Satan, to whom God delivered him for a limited amount of trial (2:6). But since that delivering over was deliberate and intentional, God held himself responsible for it. *Qui facit per alium facit per se*. God is not responsible for everything which he permits. He is not responsible for sin. Nor is he responsible for suffering as a whole, which has come into the

world as the result of sin. But he is responsible for the method of the application of individual sufferings, now that suffering is here. The wicked man who suffers as the direct result of his evil-doing can rightly say, "God means something by this." He means to check him in his wickedness and lead him to repentance. National and social law carry out God's intentions towards evil-doers. But the saint also can look up out of his sorrows to God and say, "God means something by this for me." He may mean that the saint should search himself and find some undiscovered fault and abandon it (as Eliphaz interpreted suffering), or he may mean that the saint should be patient and wait on God, living by faith and not by sight, and have strength and purity increased by trial (as Job's sufferings were to be understood). So from God's point of view no suffering is intended to be wasted.

II. Eliphaz goes on from his acceptance of the facts of the existence of suffering and its coming from God, to show the purpose of suffering.

1. Its purpose is to lead one to self-inspection, confession of sin, and repentance. He urges Job not to despise God's chastening (v. 17), because if after being wounded one turns to God in penitence, He will forgive and heal him (v. 18). The making sore is in order to the binding up, and the wounding is to drive one back to God so that he may make whole. To him who trusts God there is no such thing as retributive or judicial suffering. Christ bore the judicial sufferings of all who are his, whether before or since his advent. But there is such a thing as corrective suffering. Even in the saint there are remnants of the old man, who has a measure of existence, though he is no longer on the heart's throne. These remainders of the old life need always to be struggled

against. But sometimes we may grow careless or indolent about them. A time of trial tends to make us more thoughtful; we become cognizant of weaknesses we had overlooked in our optimistic time of prosperity. Under the stress of pain we see ourselves as we did not before. We are led to humble ourselves before God and to seek his forgiveness anew. Is any one so good that he cannot be bettered? Is any one conscious of everything in himself which is not quite as it ought to be? No. Then there is still a place for God's use of correction upon us.

2. But the true intention of it of course lies back of the thing itself. Suffering is not for suffering's sake. There is no virtue in pain *per se*. "He maketh sore and bindeth up" (v. 18). The making sore is in order to the binding up. God does not intend that the pain should end with itself. There is always in his thought a sequence to come. And that after-work is meant to be good. We need not deny that there is retributive suffering for the hardened sinner who has rejected all the offerings of God's grace. But even in his case, if he had not hardened himself this suffering would have been remedial; it would have brought him back through repentance to God, and so back to joy and peace.

III. The result of God's corrective afflictions is shown.

1. Eliphaz shows it to be an advance for the soul which is led by them to penitence. Through the whole passage (vv. 18-26) there runs the thought that the man who accepts God's correction is better off because of it. He has been led to a position preferable to that which he occupied before the correction came. Here is one of the great paradoxes of life. Let a man have everything he wants and he will deteriorate; let him suffer deprivation

and he progresses. Let him hold to life selfishly and he loses it; let him sacrifice life and he finds it. The way of humiliation is the way of exaltation. We are brought low in order that we may be lifted up. You cannot get something for nothing. For Christ you must give up the world. For growth you must submit to pruning. For the uplifting of the spiritual man there must be the depression of the natural man. We get by giving up. Christ even, we are mysteriously told, was made perfect through suffering. And we are perfected more and more by suffering too, and in a different way from Christ's, by being led to humble ourselves before God in penitence. Such a lowly soul God loves to lead up to the high places of his grace, where there are rapturous visions and joys beyond words.

2. Eliphaz indicates also that outward prosperity comes to those who accept God's correction and turn from their sins (vv. 24, 25). Here we see a man who, after having suffered deprivation, gets everything his heart could wish. His habitation, he knows, is always safe (v. 24), his flocks flourish, so that when he goes to them he finds always whatever he wants (v. 24, see Dillmann, fourth edition), and he sees about him a great family, such as would fill the heart of an Eastern sheikh like Job with great joy (v. 25). And to crown all there is given to him length of days: he fulfils the natural course of life unhindered by disease or accident, and in proper time, when he has had out of life all that even the eager heart of man could ask, he goes to his grave "like as a shock of corn cometh in in its season" (R. V., v. 26).

This is evidently an idealization of the prosperity of the righteous. Some suspect that back of other meanings in the passage there lies a reference to the history of God's

chosen people, who after all their sufferings and captivities were promised great prosperity. They hold that in addition to its personal application the book of Job was intended to have a lesson for the Jews as a nation. (Dillmann, Davidson, Cheyne.)

Eliphaz's idealization may refer to the blessedness in the future life of the saint who patiently accepts God's correction here. There all tears are wiped away from our eyes, and there is no more separation and no more death.

But it is not impossible to hold to a literal reference to the present life. Eliphaz idealizes the present, it is true; he does not stop to limit. Accordingly it appears as though it were God's intention to give large prosperity to every one who submits to His correction. But such, we know, is not the case. The wicked are allowed to flourish, and the righteous are permitted sometimes to keep on suffering. This is a world of inequalities which requires an after-world for an evening-up. But these exceptions do not prove the rule. There is inequality in the disposition of rewards in this life, and yet in the long run there is equality. Justice does not do its perfect work yet, but it is at work steadily and undeterred. God rules here as well as hereafter. Righteousness as a rule pays, and wickedness as a rule does not pay. The good things of life are not all in the hands of the enemies of God. The most successful nations through the ages have been those which deserved success; and the long successful families have been those whose traditions of uprightness have descended from father to son through generations. We do well to look to a better world for a complete adjustment of the scales of justice. But we are not to forget that this also is God's world, and that he has so constituted it in

general that blessing, even in the most material form, shall come richly upon his own.

IV. The conclusion of the matter is set as though it were a text at the opening of our lesson: "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth." Sorrow and suffering are facts; but they are not without purpose; and to him who receives them as the correction of God, and who takes occasion by reason of their suggestion to search his own heart and turn towards a better life, their end is uplifting of character and joy of heart. In these days there is plenty of introspection: we are always looking into our minds to see if we are satisfied with our position, our success, our intellectual achievement. Often enough too we search our minds for the purpose of seeing how real our faith is and what internal suggestions of the reality of our religion may be offered us. But not nearly often enough do we scrutinize ourselves to find our moral and spiritual deficiencies, that we may correct them. And when trials come upon us, which are sent not in retribution, but to give that subjugation, sobriety, and quietness of soul that are necessary for heart-searching, we treat them as hard luck—ills that we must smile at and bear as best we may, but not often as messengers of God hiding a heavenly glory behind a sombre mien. No. About the last thing troubles do for us is to lead us to know ourselves. The troublous aspect of trouble is so prominently and persistently before us that we forget about its divine aspect. "A good man is happy," says Matthew Henry, "though he be afflicted; for whatever he has lost, he has not lost his enjoyment of God nor his title to heaven; nay, he is happy because he is afflicted; correction is an evidence of his sonship and a means of his sanctification; it mortifies his corruptions, weans his heart from the world, draws

him nearer to God, brings him to his Bible, *brings him to his knees*, works him for and so is working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

And yet the last word is not said. There is a phase of suffering, not mentioned by Eliphaz, which is higher than anything known to him. It is that the good man, aside from his sins, may be permitted to suffer for the refining and spiritualizing of his life. Christ suffered and was made perfect through suffering. He was not made free from sin by it, for he had no sin. But the supreme elements of loveliness in character which he had latent within him were developed and revealed by the sorrows that encompassed him. In him there was no dross, yet the refinement by fire had its place. Aside from its office in the eradication of sin, suffering is seen to have its work for the betterment of the heart. This is the lesson which we learn in the book of Job. We see it because we are permitted to be present at the council of heaven and to hear that Job is to be tried for this purpose; not because he was a sinful man, but because he was a righteous man, whose faith and exalted disinterestedness could only be revealed by trouble. But Job did not see this, nor did his argumentative friends. So that the lesson of the book from the point of view of man is that the reason of God's providences is concealed, and that man must live by faith. But from God's position (into which we are permitted to look for a moment) we see that everything is plain, and that the righteous man's mysterious suffering is for his good, is a mark of the love of God. "Eliphaz alleges that man suffers because he is a sinner; he knew not that a man may likewise suffer because he is a saint." (William Henry Green.)

JOB'S APPEAL TO GOD.

JOB 23:1-10.

AGAIN we must find the place of the passage in the scheme of the whole book. Misunderstandings of Scripture very often arise from trying to study special parts as though they had no connection with other parts. In this way it is sometimes possible to get out of a passage precisely the opposite of its real meaning. And in no book of the Bible is this more possible than in Job, where arguments are put forth in order that they may be refuted. We are to recall then that the discussion of the problem of suffering by Job and his friends moves on in three cycles, whose scope is thus described by Prof. Davidson: the first cycle exhausts "the argument from the general conception of God;" the second exhausts "the argument from the operation of his providence in the world, as observed in the fate of the wicked;" the third shows the friends directly accusing Job of some great crime which is the cause of his suffering. In chapter 22 Eliphaz brings a pointed charge of wickedness against Job. Our lesson is the beginning of Job's reply. He does not answer Eliphaz's charge. His mind is dwelling on the thoughts that have already been brought out by the discussion, and it seems as though he had been so absorbed in these that he had not heard anything which Eliphaz said. So his reply does not meet directly the personal accusation against him, but brings out only the fact that he is not able to discover that the world is governed justly, for he himself, a righteous man, is suffering, and how can that be other than unjust? Our

passage opens with a statement of Job's dissatisfied condition of mind (vv. 1, 2) followed by a wish that he might find God and defend himself before him (vv. 3-7), and it concludes with a lament that he is not able to do so (vv. 8-10).

There are three verses which especially need explanation, 2, 6, and 7. Verse 2 is exceedingly difficult. Dean Bradley calls it "one single indignant ejaculation, which, as it is the despair of translators and commentators, I shall pass over." Davidson says "the Authorized Version is almost certainly wrong in its rendering of this verse, though a more satisfactory rendering is hard to give." Perhaps the best we can do under the circumstances is to take the tentative interpretation of the greatest living commentator on the book in his lately revised edition—Prof. Dillmann. The English of his rendering would be something like this: Even to-day (as well as on the preceding days of our conversation) is my complaint stubborn; the hand of God is heavy upon my groaning (to bring it to expression). The margin of the Revised Version also suggests this idea. The thought is that Job remains still in darkness; he sees no explanation of his suffering, he can only feel that he must continue complaining against the way in which Providence deals with him, and the continuance of that way can only serve to force from him new complaints. Verse 6 is adequately explained by the Revised Version: "Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? Nay, but he would give heed unto me." Job wants to meet God, not in His omnipotence, which would only crush him, but more as an equal, more as a human judge who would listen to his plea. Verse 7 seems to mean, "if he would only listen to me it would be seen that a doer of right was reasoning with him, and so should I be released for ever from my

judge." The idea is not so much that if God would only hear Job's prayer he might thus be able to reason with God, as that if he only had a chance to reason before God, Job's righteousness would be evident.

So much for special difficulties. Next we are to remember, in thinking of the passage, two things:

(a) The abstract question of the possibility of any man being absolutely innocent in the sight of God is not raised here. We know that before the Omniscient "there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Yet the Bible constantly speaks of the righteous man. And while it is true that there is no perfectly righteous man, tried by the standard of God's holiness, still it is true that men are divided into two great classes, those who (however imperfectly) seek to serve God and do right, and those who live in selfishness and sin. The former class are called the righteous, and relatively to others they deserve the name, and also because their hearts are right and the tendency of their lives is towards more and more righteousness. Job asserted that he was a righteous man, his friends admitted it so far as they knew his conduct (though they suspected some secret sin), and the purpose of the book is not to dispute it. In the absolute sense Job was not righteous, because no man is righteous in that sense; but in the relative sense Job's claim as to his own character was true.

(b) We are not to try to find in Job as he is exhibited in our lesson a model for ourselves when we are afflicted. In the long run, when the processes of thought have been exhausted, and Job is led to turn from his own power of solving life's riddles, and just to have faith that God is doing all things well even when we do not see it, then Job becomes the model for our imitation. But until that

end is reached Job's mind is in a condition of development, and we are to be careful not to take his doubts and his imperfect reasonings as models for us. But if such doubts and reasonings arise in us, then we are to have Job for our model in the sense that we are to escape from them as he did. In other words we are not to take Job's transitional reasonings as patterns, but if we are in a similar transitional state ourselves, his escape becomes our pattern.

Let us try to separate in Job's condition those things in which he was right from those things in which he was wrong.

I. He was right

1. In his consciousness of innocence. He had tried to serve God. He had been a righteous man in the sense which has been explained. There is nowhere in the book any real impeachment of Job's character as a God-fearing man. Indeed the whole point of the book depends on the assumption that he was such, and the problem is to explain his suffering upon that assumption. His friends denied it and thereby only introduced confusion. Their limited understanding of life made it inconceivable that a good man could be permitted to suffer. There are men who are God-fearing, and, like one young man whom Jesus looked upon and loved, near to the kingdom. It does not expedite matters to deny that they are such. No harm can be done by the recognition of genuinely good elements of character anywhere.

2. Job was right in using his reason on the great problem of suffering. Man has been defined as the curious animal; he "wants to know." He has a bent toward explanations, and this bent was given him by the Creator. It is right for us to use our minds in trying to

understand all that we can about God and his ways of working with us. Pope said, "the proper study of mankind is man." We may rather say "the proper study of mankind is God." God has revealed himself to us, why but that we might know him? And he has concealed himself also in such ways that to any one who wants to know more more is given. So that it is right for us to read and think and discuss, only we are to remember also that he has concealed much of himself from us which we are not intended to find and cannot. It is right for us to use our reason and study all we can about God, remembering always that we cannot know all there is to know about him.

3. Job was right in wanting to know God's opinion of him (verse 5). It makes a great difference what we think of God, but that is not nearly as important as what God thinks of us. His thought of us is far truer than our thought of him could possibly be. Job wanted God to answer him, and when God did so the answer was satisfactory and final. Men are very apt to come to an undefined notion that what they think about God is the truth and final. So they assume guesses to be demonstrations, whereas they would be more apt to find truth if they asked what God thought of them.

4. Job was right in his desire to be just before God. He admitted the position which God had over him; he saw that there was no hope of justice from his friends, and so he wished that he might plead his cause before Him who could appreciate it and who had a right to be his judge. "How shall a man be just with God?" is a question whose frank asking is the gateway to a better life. The trouble is that many of us are more desirous to be just in the eyes of men than in the eyes of God.

5. Job was right in holding fast in his belief in God. He was not able to see how God's way of dealing with him could be just. Indeed, he complained loudly against it as being unjust (verse 1). But he never for one moment questioned that there was a God. He had not reached that great height of intellectual achievement touched by some aspiring minds in our own day, where, in view of the difficulties connected with God's way of working, it becomes possible to see plainly that there is no God. It is a great feat of mind to reason thus: I cannot understand God, therefore there is no God! It is like saying, "There are some problems in arithmetic which I have not solved, therefore there is no arithmetic."

6. Job believed in justice as an essential element in the character of God, even though he did not see how God was just in the present instance. He thought that if he could only have a chance to meet God and present his case to him he would secure justice (verse 6). This presupposes a disposition towards justice in God. From the special instance Job would appeal to the general disposition. Back of what seemed to him injustice he believed justice lay. It is one of the ways of faith in God to leap beyond the special providence to the general, stable, inviolable character in our Father which lies back of it. We do not see how this or that can be just or kind, but we know that God is both just and kind, and we escape from our present temporary trial and find rest in the heart of our eternal Father.

II. Job was wrong

1. In his imperfect theory of suffering—wrong, that is, in the sense of being mistaken. He was trying to adjust his mind to his condition upon the theory that suffering is always a punishment for sin. We can only pity

him for not being able to see what has been clearly and positively shown to us : that suffering is often disciplinary. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." What an infinite distance there is between poor unseeing Job and ourselves, who are given eyes to behold beneficence, not in the sun behind the clouds only, but in the clouds themselves.

2. Job was wrong in his restless desire to know all the reasons for God's dealings with him. Notice that it is not wrong to want to understand all we can about God and his ways of working with us. It is wrong to feel that we are injured when we are unable to completely satisfy that want. We are taught that it was part of Christ's humiliation that he put a self-limitation upon his knowledge. As a man he did not always employ the omniscience of his divinity ; but he submitted not to know some things. Job wanted to know all the *rationale* of God's working. But Christ shows us a better way.

3. Job was wrong in wanting to have God bring himself down to a level of equality with him, laying aside his omniscience and listening, as though he were only a human judge, to Job. God is not our equal ever. If it were possible for him to undeify himself and make himself no greater than ourselves, it would not be right for him to do so. For he is the Lord God for ever and ever. His Son may become incarnate, may be our equal in humanity. But it would have been disastrous if there had not been another person in the Trinity to remain still on the throne of glory. The harmony and blessedness of the universe depend on God's being higher than man. It would not be an advantage by any means to have him at our level.

4. Job was plainly wrong in his impatient feeling towards God (verse 2). We can sympathize with him

because he had many and heavy things to fret his soul. His unsympathetic friends alone were enough to exasperate him. Nevertheless this is not a justification of his impatience. Many and many a hard thing he said about God in the course of the discussion, and how must he have felt about them when his sufferings were past and his prosperity was given back to him and he was living plainly under the smile of God? Then he could see that never, never is a human soul warranted in saying hard things of God. For God is always love, and even the trials he sends are for our blessing, if we only receive them aright.

III. General thoughts.

1. How mixed are the emotions of even the noblest souls! Over the healthful, joyous, pure feelings of the soul there is often cast the sickly hue of some unworthy state. Our deeds are not wholly perfect, neither are our emotions.

2. Progress consists in the increasing prevalency of our good over our bad moods. The old man and the new man are ever at war. One ought to be decreasing as the other increases. Job's better part prevailed at last.

3. While man's estate is transitorial he should not demand what belongs only to its completion. We live by faith. Let us not ask for perfect knowledge yet; that is to come.

JOB'S CONFESSION AND RESTORATION.

JOB 42:1-10.

WE must first find the position of the passage in the scheme of the book. Chapters 4-31 contain the discussion of the reason why God permits trouble to come to the righteous, between Job and his three friends. Chapters 32-37 contain the addresses of Elihu, a new speaker, who rebukes both Job and his friends for some of their utterances and justifies God. He lays emphasis on the thought that suffering serves to open man's ear to heavenly instruction (36:10). Chapters 38-41 describe the appearing of Jehovah upon the scene. It is to be noted that (a) he does not charge Job with sin, (b) he does not offer any direct solution of the problem which has been debated by Job and his friends. He simply reveals his majesty. Then comes Job's answer, chapter 42:1-6, followed by the epilogue (in prose, like the prologue, ch. 1, 2), which recounts the restoration of Job's prosperity (42:7-17). The lesson before us contains Job's reply to Jehovah and part of the epilogue. It sets before us *the result of Jehovah's coming into communion with Job*.

I. The result inwardly.

A. Job's new knowledge.

1. He has a new knowledge of God—not new in its facts exactly, but new in his appreciation of them. He had heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but now he could say that his eye had beheld him (v. 5). And the result was not so much a knowledge that God is (for Job never for a moment doubted that) as that he is *omnipotent* ("thou canst do everything," v. 2), and *wise* in his provi-

dence ("no purpose of thine can be restrained," v. 2, R. V.). Every revelation of God to our hearts has for its contents above the fact of God's existence the facts of his character. God is never shown to us except with his attributes. Whenever we find that he is, we at the same time find something of what he is. It is to be noticed that this new knowledge (for old knowledge reëmphasized is sometimes so different as to deserve to be called new) came to Job because he suffered. If he had not been afflicted, and been troubled with perplexities about God, the need of God's appearing on the scene would not have been developed and Job would have been so much the poorer. Suffering is always to us a means of our knowing more about God if we let him come to us in connection with it as he wishes to. The cross of trial does raise us "nearer to Thee." It is noteworthy that when Job sees God and learns of his attributes, the one attribute which he has questioned and which he would naturally want most to know about—justice—remains in the background. Nothing is said of this, but only God's omnipotence and wisdom are remarked. When God shows himself to us we are satisfied, even though he does not show that part of himself which we have most wanted to see.

2. Along with this knowledge of God there came to Job a new knowledge of himself. The words of God (38: 2) linger still in his mind, and he seems to be repeating them to himself ponderingly: "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?" (v. 3). He recognizes the words as applicable to himself, and says frankly that he has been talking about things of which he is ignorant as though he knew (v. 3). All along Job had been discussing God with his friends upon two assumptions: (a) that he was able to know all about Him; (b) that he did know

all about Him. But now he finds out that he was mistaken in both. How difficult it is to know ourselves, especially negatively. In a certain sense it is easier to know others than to know ourselves. Many a man, listening to a sermon, brings the application home vigorously to others, but fails to see (like David when Nathan preached to him) how it fits himself. In order to "see ourselves as others see us" it requires a gift from "some Power," no other indeed than God. And the gift is very apt to come in connection with a new knowledge of God, as in the case of Job. It has often been said by Christian apologists that we know God by knowing man; that is to say, our moral nature points to a perfect Being having a like moral nature. We look into the face of man and we discover some of the lineaments of God, for man was made in God's image. In the same way if we look at God we discover something about ourselves. We discover of course what we ought to be. We see that we ought to be perfect in the ways in which our Father is perfect. We discover also that we are not thus perfect. A sight of the Infinitely Holy therefore convicts us of sin. We learn what we are by contrast with something else. The artificial white with which we paint our houses is seen not to be an ideal white when we compare it with the pure snow. Job saw God, and at once he knew something novel about himself; "therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not" (v. 3).

B. In connection with Job's new knowledge there came a new state of heart.

1. He was willing to have his questionings unanswered. He does not say to God, "Thou hast told me everything I wished to know," or "I know that thou wilt let me understand some time." All thought of the vexing

problem of suffering seems to be forgotten. The vision of Jehovah has filled his soul ; his trust is complete, and it is so dominating that questioning would seem irrational. Faith has silenced doubt. Faith is not the key to knowledge always, but it does open to us an abode for the soul where an understanding of the mysteries of providence is not essential to our contentment. We are made not to know some things. The question is how to be satisfied while not knowing. And the answer is, By trust in God. It is not along the line of knowledge anyway that satisfaction lies for the craving heart. It is in the direction of confidential, intimate fellowship with our Friend. It is enough for us that He knows, even if we do not.

2. The appearance of God brought to Job the rare virtue of humility. We cannot truthfully say that heretofore Job had shown any excess of this virtue. The bold way in which he challenged God to lay aside his omnipotence and come and argue with him, the defiant, sarcastic expressions he used in view of his unanswered appeals to be righted, his announcement of his set rebelliousness of mind, are not what we should call modest. But now, having had some new insight into the character of God, his majesty and glory, he ceases to protest, to declaim about the injustice done him by his having to suffer. He sees at once that the attitude of mind out of which his bold words Godward had arisen was unbecoming one who was but a creature. "Wherefore," he says, "I loathe my words" (margin R. V.). He confesses that they were ill-advised. He recants. (Dillmann.) It is no mark of greatness to fancy one's self infallible. To acknowledge mistake is a sign of progress. Job was not half as great (even intellectually, not to speak of character) when he was confronting God with defiant questions as when

he came to such a lowly attitude that he had no questions to ask.

3. Job goes beyond humility to repentance. He says that dust and ashes are the best exponent of his state of mind (v. 6). Repentance is open to any man who thinks. Wherever there is a sin there is the opportunity of turning from it. "In Job's repentance all the marks of evangelical repentance are found—submission and abasement (v. 2); confession of sin (v. 3); humble and believing prayer (v. 4); the revelation of God to the soul (v. 5); and then the blessed result—self-knowledge, self-abhorrence, true, deep, lasting repentance." (Bayley.) What a contrast between Job protesting his righteousness and Job confessing his unrighteousness! Job was a righteous man in the relative sense, yet he came nearer the absolute truth when he confessed himself a sinner. Boasting is always dangerous; repentance is always safe. And no one, not even righteous Job, needs to hunt long for reasons for repentance.

II. The result outwardly of Job's coming into connection with God.

1. His misfortunes were reversed and "the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (v. 10). At the end of his trials we find Job, not only in heart but in external possessions, far richer than he had ever been. We cannot infer from this that God will always literally restore earthly prosperity for those who are afflicted by its loss. No such rash generalization is hinted at in the close of the book of Job. What we may reasonably infer is that God controls outer things for good ends to us. He could restore our lost friends from the grave, he could give us back our lost possessions, he could endow us once more with health, as he did for Job. But he chooses to

deal with us in unmiraculous ways. We are not to infer from this ever that the Lord's hand is shortened. But he chooses his own way; only it is always the way of blessing through external things for those who love him. The universe is in his keeping, all things are obedient to him, and all things work together for good to them that love him. If he does not grant us material prosperity as a compensation for trouble, as in Job's case, it is for good reasons of his own, not at all for lack of power.

2. God transformed Job's sorrow into joy. We can be absolutely certain in saying that some time and somewhere he will do the same for us if we are his. It may be largely in this life, as in the case of Job. We cannot tell; certainly we are never warranted in despairing. Our night cannot be any darker than other nights have been that have been followed surely by the day. But even if our hopes of finding outward joy should be disappointed in this life, the statement still remains true that sorrow and sighing shall flee away in the world of glory to come. Job and his friends argued out the question of sorrow with their eyes fixed only upon the present life. But the area of vision has been enlarged by our blessed Lord, who brought life and immortality to light. The future is ours; there is a place of compensation; there is a realm where a smile is given for every tear of earth.

3. The result of God's coming into immediate connection with Job was also that Job was able to be of service to his friends. Jehovah was angry against the three friends (v. 7). They had not spoken of God's providence the thing that was right. "By disingenuously covering up and ignoring its enigmas and seeming contradictions, they had cast more discredit upon it than Job by honestly holding them up to the light." (Green.) Through

God's coming into connection with Job they were apprised of their mistake and were shown how they might propitiate God. And because of the favor in which Job stood with God his prayer for them was efficient in securing pardon (v. 8). It was not merely that the friends were wrong in the words uttered in the controversy; they were wrong in the ideas which lay back of them and which formed a part of their condition towards God. This condition needed to be corrected. They might not have found out that there was anything wrong in it if it had not been for Jehovah's appearing before Job. God coming to him was a means of his being a blessing to others. It is so with ourselves. If God draws nigh to us spiritually and gives us new insight into his character and his ways of working, if he gives us a new outpouring of his grace, it is in order that we, thus enlightened and enriched, may bring blessing to others. We are not ignorant that our earthly possessions are a loan, which we are to use in the service of God for the blessing of men. But we sometimes forget that our spiritual blessings are also an endowment of the same sort.

III. General lessons.

1. The conclusion of the book of Job shows to us the mercy of God. God sometimes seems unmerciful, but it is only seeming. Nature and natural laws seem cruel; destiny appears hard. How can a merciful God permit innocent children to suffer? How can he let the weak and helpless bear the consequences of the sins of the strong and wilful? Such questions are often asked to-day. They are in another form the same question which troubled Job. Why do the righteous suffer? Job's question was not answered. Our questions are not answered. But it none the less remains true that God is merciful,

compassionate to such a degree that we are not able to appreciate it. In dealing with the character of God it is the height of folly to infer that a thing cannot be so because we cannot see how it could be so. Facts and our measure of facts are two different matters.

“For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.”

2. The most striking point in connection with the conclusion of the book of Job is that Job's questions remain unanswered. The mystery of providence is unsolved. Job and his friends brought out many explanations of the affliction of the righteous only to find them inadequate. The explanation known to us, that afflictions are not for punishment, but for purification to those who love God, was not apparent to them. They disappear from the scene with their difficulties undiminished. The lesson of the inexplicability of providence is very plain. Even we, who know so much more of God's ways of dealing with his children than Job did, see through a glass darkly. All the mysteries are not yet revealed. We live by faith and not by sight. To convince ourselves of this and to be content and happy in it is to have learned how to live.

3. Yet Job was satisfied. It was better for him to have Jehovah reveal himself and his glory to him than to know all things he wanted to know. There is something better than knowledge, something for which knowledge would be no substitute: the peace of the soul in fellowship with God. God “may remove perplexities regarding his providence and ways from men's minds, but he does not do so by the immediate communication of intellectual light, but by flushing all the channels of thought and life

with a deeper sense of himself. Under the flow of this fuller sense of God, perplexities disappear just as rocks that raise an angry surf when the tide is low are covered and unknown when it is full." (Davidson.) Job like Thomas found something better than a literal answer of doubts.

4. The supreme lesson of this sublime book is that joy comes through submission to God. If we are trying to find joy by widening knowledge, by solving difficulties, we are using a means that is incongruous to the end. If all our questions were answered satisfactorily it would not follow that we should be happy. Happiness for the human soul is not in conquest, but in being conquered; not in exaltation, but in humiliation. Save your life and you lose; give it up and you win. Not to know, not to get, not to strive passionately for enjoyment, but to bow low before God and his Christ, to bear the yoke, to obey, this is the way to find the joy that passeth knowledge.

WISDOM'S WARNING.

PROV. I : 20-33.

THE book of Proverbs is a jewel-case well filled with gems. There are fashions in gems as in other things. Pearls were to the Orient what diamonds are to us. The book of Proverbs has sometimes been thought of as dry reading when compared to other parts of the Bible. Different ages lay emphasis on different parts of Scripture, and doubtless it was meant to be so, for the Scripture proves itself to be divine just by this versatility through which it is able to offer to every age that which is most suited to its needs. With us the book of Proverbs is taking a new and more exalted position. We find that there is unity in its variety and consistency in its diversity. The commentaries that are appearing upon it show revived interest in it. This may be because of the increased attention given to ethics in our day, which finds large stimulus in the book of Proverbs ; or it may be because without resorting to the allegorizing method which used to deprive the book of its just teachings by loading it with such as it did not truly contain, we are able to find depths in its chapters that have heretofore been unguessed. To the merely literary student Proverbs is a mine of fascinating glories. But for the devoutly religious reader it contains what is far better, real spiritual food of the most nourishing quality.

The passage before us contains a delightfully Oriental presentation of the truth of the call of God to the soul of man. We have first the call (vv. 20-23), and then the results of the call (vv. 24-33).

A. *The call of wisdom.*

The idea of wisdom is peculiar to the book of Proverbs. It would be exceedingly interesting to bring together all the passages referring to it and formulate a statement from them. But it must suffice to state simply the results of such formulation. As the outcome of such study three points emerge into view.

(1) By wisdom is meant *the beneficent divine energy*; as such it is personified and represented as brought forth and installed before the creation of the world and so associated with Jehovah in his work of creation and providence, but especially as his agent in training the children of men. Chapter 8 is the great passage on this phase of the doctrine of wisdom. It is doubtful whether we ought to seek to identify this personification of one of the divine attributes with either person of the Trinity. It is certainly true, as we shall see, that this Old Testament idea has its fulfilment in our Saviour. But the personification of an attribute is not the same as a person; moreover the personification is feminine and it shows many traits belonging to the Holy Spirit. It is wiser therefore not to press the identification. In doing so some have unwittingly done violence to the Word of God.

(2) This divine energy comes into connection with man and produces *a reflection of itself* in him. This is wisdom on the human side. We see this meaning when we are told that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. In its human aspect wisdom is "piety or God-likeness of heart and life." (Butler.) The two aspects of wisdom (i. e., wisdom as an attribute of God, and wisdom as a reflection of that attribute in man) are thus combined by Horton: "There is a unity in the Hebrew wisdom; the unity is found in the thought of the Creator;

all the facts of the physical world, all the problems of human life, are referred to his mind ; objective wisdom is God's being, which includes in its circle everything ; and subjective wisdom, wisdom in the human mind, consists in becoming acquainted with his Being and all that is contained in it, and meanwhile in constantly admitting that he is, and yielding to him the rightful place in our thought."

(3) The complete presentation of this divine wisdom going forth for the enlightenment of men is found in *Jesus Christ*. He is no personification of wisdom, he is Wisdom itself. Unto them which are called he is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). He "of God is made unto us wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:30). In him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). In him we are made wise (1 Cor. 4:10). We are sometimes in danger of reading the New Testament too much into the Old. But we are never in any danger in thus finding the Old fulfilled in the New. The wisdom of which Solomon dreamed has been far more clearly shown to us. We look upon it shining in the face of Jesus Christ.

In the passage before us, Wisdom, the personification of the divine energy, is picturesquely represented as a woman, beautiful and attractive, who stands in the open place at the gates of the city—which was the market-place, council hall, and judges' bench all in one—where she cries out loudly so that all can hear, and invites them urgently to come without money and without price and receive instruction from her.

1. This call is *open*. God proclaims his grace loudly and everywhere. In all the myriad forms of nature, in conscience, in providence, in history, in revelation, God calls to the soul of man. No soul is exempt. The whole

market-place of the world resounds with the loud appeal. Every cranny and every corner are penetrated, and all the hidden souls, all those who are neglected and may be forgotten of men, are reached by the divine voice which finds every man out.

2. The offer made in the call is *free*. Wisdom promises to give instruction to all who will come and listen to her. God promises wisdom from on high to every one who will come and receive it. A man may be blind, blinded by sin, and may say, "I stumble because I cannot see." Yes, but God stands by to give sight to all who will take it, so that the stumbling sinner is without excuse. We do not sin because we must, but because we will not listen to the wisdom of God. Plato held that in order to do the right all that was necessary was to know the right. In that form the statement is not true. But it is true that he who will receive God's wisdom, freely offered without respect of persons, will be wise even unto salvation.

3. *All classes of men* are touched by this call of God. Simple ones—those who in their guilelessness are led astray almost without knowing it; scorners—those who are proud of being a little bad and ridicule the scrupulously upright from the point of view of a sophisticated and wise worldliness; and fools—those who have hardened themselves in sin and find righteousness to be far from their thoughts—all are summoned by the divine voice to come and learn how to live (v. 22). We see here three degrees of degeneration in sin. For sin has vitality and therefore growth, and when once it has taken possession of a man it must either be altogether eradicated, or else it will eradicate everything but itself in the man. And all the way along this path of degeneracy

God's voice calls to the sinner, whether he be only the simple beginner or whether he have gone on into scorning or even to the extreme of folly. How wilful is man in his sin, when one considers that at every step in it he must resist the deterring voice of God!

4. God's call is *urgent*. He expostulates, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" he entreats, "Turn you at my reproof;" he promises, "Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you;" he threatens and warns (vv. 24-32). God does not fling down an alternative to men and then go away and let them settle it for themselves. He urges, he begs, he pleads as a father dealing with erring children whom he loves and would bring back from error. He explains the consequences of sin, uses every argument, and shows himself, Almighty God, in the attitude of a suppliant, beseeching man to choose that which is for his own happiness. Could anything be more touching than this picture of the pleading God? Matthew Henry has justly pointed out that this divine cry is "very pathetic," and that it is well portrayed for us in the figure of one who when here upon earth "stood and cried" (John 7:37).

B. The *results of the call* of Wisdom are set forth (vv. 24-33).

1. *Refusal* of God's offer is possible, and consequences necessarily follow (vv. 24-32). It is an awful thing to contemplate, this possibility of a man's turning his back upon the pleading God. It is enough to make angels weep. But the possibility seems to be necessary, as involved in the freedom of the human will.

(a) This acceptance of sin puts man in the attitude of *the rejection of God*. It is refusing his call, not regarding his hand stretched out in invitation, setting at naught

his counsel, and rejecting his reproof (vv. 24, 25). It thus sets man up as an enemy of God. Men resent this word enemy. They say that an enemy is one who hates another, but they are not conscious of hating God, and therefore they object to the word as applied to themselves. But whoever thwarts or tries to thwart (no matter with what motive) the plans of a king is an enemy. God has plans for this world in which every human soul is meant to take a part. To abandon that part, what else can it be than to enroll one's self among the antagonists of the King? He that is not for God is against God, and more men are enemies of God than are willing to admit it.

(b) Because of the refusal of the wisdom of God, when the day of fear at last comes like a storm that blackens all the sky, and man wants God's wisdom to fly to as a refuge, he finds that *it is no longer available* (vv. 26, 28). Wisdom is portrayed as laughing and mocking at the men who call upon her too late. This is a terribly realistic picture of the great truth that it is possible for man to call upon God when it is too late. Not that it is too late for God to help, or that God is unwilling to help, but that the cry, coming out of a heart hardened in sin, is not the cry of real repentance, but only of terror, and therefore God's gift cannot come to that heart, even though he stands ready to give it, because the heart has made itself incapable of true repentance. It has sometimes been said that if the devils in hell repented truly God would forgive them, but that they have made themselves ever increasingly incapable of repentance, and therefore they are increasingly incapable of forgiveness. If that should be a mere speculation, still the idea at the foundation of the statement is true as applied to men in this world. It is true that God is ever ready to forgive the penitent soul.

His word leaves no doubt of that. But emphasis must be laid on the fact that the soul may harden itself so that it cannot repent, and therefore cannot accept God's kindly offers (see Heb. 12: 17; Luke 13: 24).

(c) *Calamity* comes upon those who reject the voice of the Wisdom of God (v. 27). It comes as a terrific storm, as an overwhelming whirlwind. We talk to-day very much (and rightly) of the love of God. We are to remember that it is one of the marks of God's love that he tells us plainly the dark consequences of rejecting his love. It is painful to think that a single human soul should be lost, but the pain is beneficent (like warning physical pain) if it leads us to seek God with all our heart and to plead with dying men to turn away from their sins to him. That calamity is the result of the refusal of the offers of God is an arrangement with which we have nothing whatever to do. Our acquiescence in it or rebellion against it has no effect upon it. It has been revealed to us not for our harm, but that its painfulness may lead us into that course which is for our good. The strongest retributive prophecies in the New Testament are the words of the tender Son of God, and their strength is just a mark of the depth of his tenderness.

(d) The retribution which comes upon those who refuse to hear the voice of Wisdom is largely *internal*. They eat of the fruit of their own way, they are filled with their own devices (v. 31). If a man has to depend for the sustenance of his spiritual life only upon his own imaginings, the result is spiritual death. We can have no worse fate than to be left alone. It is hell to be abandoned by God, abandoned to the unchecked development of our own sinful tendencies. Then the time comes when one can say, "Myself am hell."

2. Let us bless God that there is another side to the matter, that *it is possible for men to hear and obey Wisdom's voice*. There is result for them too as well as for those who hear and reject. The result to the obedient is only lightly touched upon here.

(a) Part of it is *safety* (v. 33). The soul that depends upon God is hedged about by strongholds better than the mountains that are round about Jerusalem, even the arms of the Almighty God. Against him temptation cannot raise itself successfully, nor death nor hell. Nothing can separate him from that eternally guarding love.

(b) Out of this comes *quietude* (v. 33). The peace that passeth understanding comes to the heart, because there is nothing able to reach past God's barriers to give disquiet.

(c) This lesson has its full application in relation to Wisdom incarnate, even *the Lord Jesus Christ*.

1. He *calls* too with a voice more tender, more manly, more heavenly than any other ever heard. From his throne of triumph he salutes us, and pointing to the nail-prints bids us be reconciled with God. Who can resist such a voice?

2. But there are *diverse consequences* here also for those who answer this voice diversely. Christ plainly indicated this. There are two ways, and two ways only, the one of obedience to the voice, the other of disobedience; the one of eternal life, the other of eternal death. And every man goes one way or the other. Which way is yours? The voice of Wisdom calleth. He that hath ears let him hear.

THE VALUE OF WISDOM.

PROV. 3:11-24.

IN this lesson we have something of the brighter side of the subject of wisdom. In the last lesson we learned how disastrous it is to reject the appeal of the divine voice. Now we are to see how blessed it is to listen to it and obey it. The words of God are not all warning. Many of them are comforting and full of promise. And even the warning words are given to the end that we may find comfort at last. So that all of God's messages to us are messages of light.

In a gnomic book like Proverbs we should not expect to find a sequence of argument such as appears in the writings of Paul. Proverbs is a cluster of gems; Romans is a chain of gold. The characteristic of one is not that of the other. But usually we may divide the gem-clusters or analyze them into minor groups to assist our meditation upon them. This is possible in the group of apothegms before us.

1. First we have a lesson about *one way of learning wisdom* (vv. 11, 12). This is by means of "the chastening of the Lord." It is true the Hebrew word used here means instruction (see margin R. V.), but it means instruction through chastisement, so that chastisement remains the chief element connoted.

We have then the important thought brought before our minds that the chastisement of God is one way by which the heart of man is taught wisdom. This is not the only way. In diverse modes God conveys his truth to men. The world is full of voices, and they all speak of

God. But if all other voices sounded forth and the voice of chastisement were silent, how many a man would miss wisdom ! For there are some who heed no other voice but this. They enjoy nature, they accept prosperity, they read the revelation in Scripture, but nothing penetrates to the heart. Then there comes some bodily affliction like blindness, or property is all lost, or the dearest face in all the world is laid away under the sod, and then, and not till then, the heart finds God. Charles Simeon once visited an asylum near Edinburgh. He asked a blind man some questions about his affliction and the result of it upon his feelings towards God, and the answer was, " I never saw till I was blind ; nor did I ever know contentment when I had my eyesight as I do now that I have lost it. I can truly affirm, though few know how to credit me, that I would on no account change my present situation and circumstances with any that I ever enjoyed before I was blind." Many a time a life that has been frivolous or selfish or indifferent to spiritual things has been led into the path of wisdom by affliction. A school teacher sometimes fails to convey the lesson to the mind of the pupil, until at last a sharp raising of the voice arrests the wandering attention and secures the result. God sometimes has to let affliction come to us to make us listen and learn as we ought ; this is but the raising and sharpening of his voice a little for our blessing. How unwise therefore to despise affliction, i. e., to hold it to be only " hard luck," to feel sure that God has nothing in it of teaching for us. He would not let the chastening come unless we had something yet to learn. When it does come, therefore, it behooves us to listen patiently and reverently.

We are to notice that here in Proverbs we find that high meaning of suffering, for lack of seeing which Job

was so perplexed in his trials. And we are to notice also that this is the highest interpretation of it, for even the New Testament goes no further, but in its most sublime passage of encouragement to those who are tried takes up this very passage and expands it (Heb. 12:5). This "first distinct utterance of a truth which has been so full of comfort to thousands, the summing up of all controversies, like those of Job's friends (Job 5:17), or our Lord's disciples (John 9:2), as to the mystery of suffering" (Plumptre), this first utterance is also the final utterance. God's way of teaching us, even when it seems hard, must be the best way for us.

2. The next lesson is that of the *blessedness of wisdom* (vv. 13-15). The form in which this is expressed is like that which begins the first Psalm, "Oh the blessedness of the man!" The exclamatory phrase is intended to be exceedingly emphatic.

This blessedness is expressed in the way which would mean most to an Oriental. To him things to be desired would be considerably ornamental, like silver, fine gold, rubies (or perhaps pearls, as some think, v. 15). And then he is allowed to let his imagination run riot. Let him think of anything in the world which he would like to possess very much, wisdom is still infinitely more to be desired (v. 15). If we translate these words into ideas of to-day, we should say wisdom is better than princely wealth, the highest possible social position, splendid political success, erudition of the first rank, libraries of the most precious books, taste of the utmost refinement. If we do not care for the silver and gold and rubies of the Orient, we do care very much for these things and strive for them with intense zeal. But wisdom is better than all of them put together and multiplied a thousand-fold.

Christ puts the same idea in another form : let a man be the emperor of the world, own everything in it, have every soul a minister to his pleasure, and have the power of disposing of everything as he wills, still such an exalted position as that would be an awful loss if as the price of having it the man had to forfeit the possibility of following the wisdom of God. "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

And why is it blessed thus to choose wisdom? Reasons are given. Wisdom is represented as a woman holding out to men in her two hands the things which men most desire. In her right hand is length of days, and in her left riches and honor (v. 16). What man wants most is life itself. Without this all other things are nothing, for the man is not here to enjoy them. This is the condition of everything else. How is it that the pursuit of wisdom secures length of life to man? Are good men miraculously granted long lives as a reward for their virtues? No, we do not presuppose miracle except where it is necessary. Does the pursuit of wisdom tend naturally then to give a man longer life? Yes, we may say without hesitation, it does. Premature death is either by disease, accident, or suicide. The last is impossible to the man who follows wisdom; it is the part of the coward, not of the morally wise. The second cause acts as well upon the wise as the unwise. Wisdom does not exempt one from the action of providence. The tower of Siloam falls on the just as well as on the unjust. The first cause also acts upon both good and bad, but not under equal conditions. The unwise man may induce death by dissipation; or if not going to that extreme, he may so weaken his constitution that when he is exposed to disease he may not be able to resist it or shake it off. Another form of

unwisdom leads men so to set their hearts on the things of earth that they break down the nervous system in their mad anxiety, and disease is either directly induced, or if accidentally met with, it is welcomed. The wise man, who serves God in quietude and simplicity, has an even, regular habit of life which tends to longevity. There are many ways in which it might be shown that those who choose the way of God's wisdom are not so apt to break down under the assault of disease. Of the three causes of immature death then, accident, disease, and suicide, we may say respecting the first that the wise and unwise are alike; respecting the second, the wise man has the better position; from the third the wise man is wholly exempt. Without summoning the aid of miracle at all, we are able to see that it is literally true that godliness naturally tends to longevity.

In the same way we might turn to Wisdom's left hand and see that she really bestows riches and honor upon those who obey her. We may not say that riches and honor always go to the good and never to the bad. Scripture warns us to the contrary constantly. But we must believe, taking the world over, that it pays to do right even from a worldly point of view. In the long run prosperity and honor go to those who deserve them. Our optimism necessitates our believing this. Godliness hath promise for this life as well as for that which is to come.

We do not need to prove that Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness and all her by-paths full of peace (v. 17). Where would you go to find those who truly enjoy life? To the epicure, the man of mental or bodily dissipation, the ungodly rich, the frivolous? Surely not. These lives do not contain the formula of peace. Rest,

joy for the heart of man, is found only in God. It would be strange if it could be otherwise, since God intended that it should be so. God means that the man who seeks the golden apple of pleasure shall find at last that he has picked nothing but Dead Sea fruit, and that he who seeks wisdom shall find the tree of life holding its richly laden boughs down for him to pluck (v. 18). God intends that happiness shall come only to those who retain wisdom (v. 18), and it would be odd indeed if the laws of life should work out some other end than that designed by the Law-maker.

3. But where is this wisdom to be found? *The seat of it is pointed out: it is in God* (vv. 19, 20). Look out at nature. There you see the heavens telling in every sunbeam, in every star, of the glorious Intelligence which gave them being. The ocean, thunderous or calm, speaks majestically of a greater majesty than its own. The dew gently falling upon the thirsty grass utters forth the thoughtful love of One without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground. Whoever wants to learn will go to one who knows more than himself. The man seeking wisdom looks up to Him whose superhuman wisdom is declared in every rain-drop and every grass-blade. These are the testimonials of the great Teacher who alone can give man the learning of life. It is as foolish for a man to try to live without asking the counsel of God as for a grass-blade to try to grow without depending on God to know how. And with surety it may be said that whoever earnestly wants to know how to live will somehow find his way to God. For he who seeks shall find.

4. *The consequences of the receiving of wisdom* are told in part (vv. 21-24). They are such as life, grace, safety, and peace. These have been touched upon already

(vv. 16-18) in considering the blessedness of wisdom. But grace is a new element not mentioned before. Man is made with the sense of beauty. What it is that satisfies it is hard to say. The definition of beauty has taxed the ingenuity of every speculative philosopher from Plato to Herbert Spencer. But we know either that a thing is beautiful or that it is not, whether we are able to tell why it is beautiful or not. And we know that there are degrees of beauty. There is sensuous beauty, like that of the sunset, the flower, or the human face. There is intellectual beauty, like that of an ode of Sophocles, or one of Dante's visions, or a sonnet of Wordsworth. And there is moral beauty, the highest of all, which is the grace of lovely character. When Emerson with failing mind stood beside the grave of Longfellow he said, "I cannot remember the name of this dear friend, but he was a beautiful soul." Heaven is the most beautiful place of the universe, and its beauty is not sensuous, for the gold and the jewels of John's vision are only symbols; but it is the beauty of purity, of holiness, the beauty that is reflected by human hearts that stand in the white light of the presence of the holy God. Deeper than the rare beauty of the human face, than the rarer beauty of the cultivated mind, is the rarest of all beauties, that of character.

The life of wisdom of the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in the life of the soul in Jesus Christ. And to us the conclusion of this lesson is that the most valuable things for man are in accepting Christ. The value of the Christian life is made clear by taking up such things as are sometimes supposed to be disadvantageous in it and seeing how they are transformed into blessings. Such things as these are supposed to be unpleasant in it: its definite committal, outspoken avowal, sacrifice of pleasure, loss of

independence, irksome duties. But when we once burn our bridges behind us and commit ourselves to Christ, we have a deep satisfaction in feeling that this important matter is settled ; if avowal of him sometimes is hard, yet we have the compensating joy of being united in that avowal with the best men of the ages ; if we must sacrifice somewhat, yet we are assured that a good life must be happier than a selfish one ; if we give up our independence and self-will, we find that there is a higher joy in obedience ; if duty seems irksome at first, it is gradually transformed as we come to love Christ more, until we wish that he had given us harder things to do, so that we might have more to offer him as a testimonial of our love. Surely that life which turns its own seeming disadvantages into positive enjoyments must be the pleasantest life. Such is the life of the soul in Christ, who is made unto us the wisdom of God. *His* ways are ways of pleasantness and all *his* paths are peace.

FRUITS OF WISDOM.

PROV. 12:1-15.

WE have studied the doctrine of Wisdom theoretically (lesson 5) and also argumentatively (lesson 6). It remains to look at it in the most literal detailed application to life. This is done in the passage before us. There is no internal relation apparent between the separate verses, so it will be most convenient to group them about heads of our own.

Only two matters need introductory attention. (a) The parallelism of the verses. Each verse is made up of two members, the first giving the positive statement of a practical truth, and the second giving the reverse in negative form. The reverse is not always the exact opposite of the first member (e. g., verse 1), but by the introduction of new elements a pleasing variety is secured and thought is stimulated. We may compare this with the rhymes of Browning, which are sometimes made triflingly inexact for the apparent purpose of relieving monotony and keeping attention alert. The Proverbs illustrate the virtue of irregularity in regularity. (b) The people addressed are evidently engaged in farming, and agricultural virtues are encouraged. But special advice is always the best, and we have no difficulty in translating it into terms that fit our circumstances. Advice to farmers is easily transformed into advice for townsmen.

1. *The relation of the man of wisdom to God.* He is in favor with the Lord, whereas the man of un wisdom is condemned of God (v. 2). The book of Proverbs contains many a piece of plain, homely, every-day advice;

and some in reading it have thought it more prudential and worldly than high-minded and spiritual. But they have overlooked such verses as this, which are frequent in the book. The ethics of Proverbs is most deeply religious. All moral obligations derive from the Creator, and the foundation of wisdom is over and over again stated to be in the fear of the Lord. This separates the book of Proverbs from any ordinary collection of moral sayings, such as "Poor Richard's Almanac." Such collections lay down prudential maxims without going to the root of the matter like Proverbs. It is not so important to tell men that they ought to do right (they know that already) as to show them how they may do the right when they know it. This is done by referring them to the source of right conduct, which is in a right relation with God. Many a moral teacher fails because he tries to lead men to produce an effect without a cause: he tries to induce them to act right without first setting their hearts right. But the man who is in favor with God, who has made his peace with him through repentance and faith, is on the road to goodness, and conversely the man who is on the road of goodness is in favor with God.

2. *The traits of character* belonging to the wise man are set forth partially here.

(a) He is *truthful* (v. 6). The wicked lay traps for the righteous by means of lying; but the righteous man, by means of his candor, his straightforward truthfulness, passes out of these snares unharmed. Often the machinations of evil men have been defeated by the innocent simple-mindedness of their intended victim. The truth is mighty and does prevail. Perhaps the most consummate systematizer of deceit as a law of life was Macchiavelli, and he found himself unable to escape the torture, for all

his skill in evasion. A man who lies "to get out of a scrape" is digging for himself a deeper pitfall than the one he is trying to evade.

(b) The wise man is *receptive*. He is open in giving out truth from his own mind, and he is open also to receive it from others. He loves to be led into the way of knowledge, even though it be by means of correction, whether from men or God (v. 1). He does not think that he "knows it all;" he does not fancy that whatever he does is "about right;" rather he takes advantage gladly of the knowledge and experience of others (v. 15). We sometimes hear of pupils who know more than the teacher; they are those who have by their self-satisfaction incapacitated themselves to learn at all. To want to know involves the inference of not knowing. Many times Proverbs emphasizes this idea of being willing to be taught. It is a good thing to apply it with some self-scrutiny to our own hearts.

(c) The man who follows wisdom has *good practical judgment*. His thoughts are "judgments," i. e., are correctly formed; whereas the counsels (literally "steerings") of the wicked are erroneous (v. 5). One decides the questions of daily life wisely and successfully, while the other, by imagining that he is going to gain somewhat by deceit, is led astray and makes blunders. If we were in perplexity we would not go for advice to a notorious trickster, however brilliantly he may have succeeded now and then; but we would choose some honest, thoughtful, far-seeing man of God as our counsellor. His judgment we feel we could trust.

(d) The man of wisdom is *industrious*. "Better is he that is lightly esteemed and serveth himself (LXX.) than he that honoreth himself and lacketh bread" (v. 9). That

is, the man who humbles himself to bear a burden of daily toil is better off than the man whose pride will not permit him to work. The world has no use for the idler, and he has no use for himself. His foolish pride makes him a laughing-stock and leads him into distress. The man who goes to work is taken care of somehow; but to run with empty-headed idlers is the height of folly (v. 11). The teaching of the Bible is that work is one of the necessary conditions given to life, by God. It is not strange therefore, seeing that it is God's intention that it should be so, that the idler fails to have what he wants of this world's goods, fails to have respect from his fellow-men, and fails to be happy in the solitude of his own heart. Idleness is a civil wrong; it is a wrong against one's own soul (whose capacities are developed only under the stress of work), and it is a wrong against God.

(e) The wise man is *kind-hearted* (v. 10). Even for the beast he is thoughtful. Respect for the feelings of animals has sometimes been thought to be lacking in the Bible. But it appears repeatedly (Exod. 20: 10; 23: 4, 5; Jonah 4: 11, for instance). The feeling of kindness is one broad temper of thought running through man's whole disposition. It is not limited to a part of the area of man's relations, but it influences everything. A man who is unkind in one direction, even though he be kind in all else, we do not call a kind man, any more than we would call a man truthful who lied about money matters, even if he were strictly veracious in everything else. Truthfulness is a temper of heart which must appear in every activity of the man, and kindness is a like temper. Therefore if you see a man beating his horse cruelly, you do not call him kind, although you may know that when he goes home at night he fondles his children on his knee with in-

tense joy: Nor would you call a child kind-hearted who pelted animals with stones and pulled off the wings of insects, even if he were very affectionate towards his mother. True kindness makes prompt response to anything which appeals to it, whether it be man or beast. Notice that among the prudential virtues Proverbs does not fail to include those which are disinterested. The charity which Paul so magnificently honored finds its foreshadowing in the Old Testament.

3. The wise man in *his relations with other men.*

(a) He *has honor from others.* They commend him, whereas they look down on the man of folly (v. 8). The desire for honor is one of the strongest motives of the heart. And in order to satisfy it men are sometimes tempted to do dishonorable things, and by this inconsistency they deprive themselves of the possibility of having that very thing which they seek. What real satisfaction could there be to Nero when (after using the most diabolical means to secure his purpose) he found himself saluted as a god by a fawning court, if he knew that every smiling courtier hated him, and that not a soul in his empire truly loved him? Honor dishonorably won is not honor. Honor is a feeling in the hearts of others towards us. It is often denoted by outward signs. But the signs are meaningless without the feeling. The man therefore only has true honor whose name is honestly revered. And such reverence comes only to that nobility of character whose spring is in that heart-wisdom which consists in the fear of the Lord.

(b) Such a character *brings honor to others* as it associates with them. They are lifted up by being connected with it. This is illustrated by the example of a good woman (v. 4). She is like a crown to her husband.

Men admire him because of his relation to her. Many a man has derived distinction from his connection with a godly father or his friendship with a devout man. Even when such relationships are natural and not of choice they give honor. And when they are the products of choice (as in friendship or marriage) the honor is of still higher grade; for who would not love to have it known that he had been taken into the close intimacy of a pure noble heart? Being thus received shows that there must be something in the man worthy of such a friendship, and so it is an indirect testimonial of character. A good man goes through life bringing blessings far beyond what he can estimate to all he meets.

(c). Such a wise man is *safe from embroilments* with others. A man without principle is always getting into troubles from which the righteous escapes (v. 13). Sins with the lips are not generally estimated by us justly. They seem very secondary sins. But they are constantly emphasized in the book of Proverbs and equally constantly in the New Testament (e. g., James 3: 5, 6). An evil word is so intangible that it seems far less of a sin than a blow. But it has often been pointed out (as by Canon Liddon) that the greatest sins are not those which are grossest. If we men were without bodies, still we should be capable of the most abandoned crimes of heart. The wise man watches his lips. Out of his good heart come good words, and so he is not involved in disputes and wranglings with his neighbors. He is a peace-maker rather than a peace-breaker, and so shows himself to be a true child of God (Matt. 5: 9). It needs heavenly wisdom to direct us how to speak. Words slip so easily from us, and are so fraught with consequence beyond our desire, that safety is only in a heart always subdued to the Wis-

dom that "ever waketh." Every morning we should pray, "God help me this day that my words may be gracious, loving, and laden with blessing to all I meet."

4. The *results to himself* of the wisdom of the good man. These have been largely dealt with in lesson six. But the method of Proverbs is iteration. A thing only once said is not well said. We need to have truth ever ringing in our ears. The noise of the world drowns it, but if it will only persist in sounding, its constancy will at last command attention, like the ringing of a chime amid the stir of the city.

(a) The wise man has *a return* for his devotion to that which is good. Satisfaction is dealt out to him, and his uprightness is not unrewarded (v. 14). Here we have the old, the new, the ever forgotten, the never invalid truth that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. This is especially emphasized by the naturalistic philosophy of our day. No one could teach more strongly than Herbert Spencer that consequences follow conduct. But naturalistic philosophy is fatalistic. Its teaching of the law of consequences is apparently useless since it holds that a man cannot help doing whatever he does. The only thing left for him to do is to mourn that there is such a law as that of consequence, which is a sorrow that is without hope. The Bible however teaches men this law, and at the same time tells them that they are not fated to do wrong, but may choose the right if they will, so that by seeing plainly the diverse results of conduct, they may be led to choose that which is right. The knowledge that there is a sure return for whatever we do thus becomes a powerful motive to action.

(b) *The character of the result* is described in both directions. The wicked urge themselves onward into a

net; they seek protection with evil men, but fail to find it (either meaning is possible, v. 12). In any case they fail. Whereas the righteous are like trees that bear good fruit, or their roots are strong to protect them (see Plumptre on the passage). In a word, failure comes to the bad, prosperity to the good. We have seen before this that this generalization is safe even for this life. It is more apparent when we bear in mind the world that is to come. The world is made so that righteousness shall pay. It would be passing strange if any feeble son of man were able to thwart the intentions of the Almighty God.

(c) *Stability* is especially noted as one of the rewards of the good (vv. 3, 7). It is the same thought which we find in Christ's parable of the house built upon the rock. What desperate efforts men make to give stability to some part of themselves, though it be only their name. Turn to the carved walls of the Assyrian palaces, the pyramids of Egypt. Such persistence is very shadowy. God offers us one that is better. He holds out to us an eternity of personal life if we will only bring ourselves into connection with him who is in himself eternal. If God takes us to himself we shall last as long as he lasts—for ever. And the way to him is open through wisdom, wisdom incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ.

AGAINST INTEMPERANCE.

PROV. 23:29-35.

THE dangers of intemperance are taught to us in many forms in the Bible. It is one of the horrors of the subject that it has so many sides and all so full of sadness and terror.

The passage before us from the Proverbs confines itself to one phase of the matter—the effect of intemperance upon the man himself. Sometimes the result of study is made more impressive by a limitation of the area of thought. It is so here. We leave out of account for the time being the effect of a man's intemperance upon his family and friends, upon posterity, upon society, upon the State, and upon his relations to God. We are to think only of its effect upon himself. There is not any attempt made to argue the matter, but many thoughts upon the theme are uttered just as they crowd themselves upon the writer's mind. And the result is all the more impressive because of this fragmentary way of thinking and speaking. The impression upon our minds is as though the writer had said, "This is a terrible subject; contemplation of it distracts and confounds me. I can only utter a few exclamations; for if I should attempt to tell deliberately and at length the fulness of the woe of drunkenness, it would be past endurance." Perhaps it may assist our thought to arrange these fragmentary and explanatory utterances into a sequence.

1. We see the *delusiveness* of this sin as it addresses itself to man's mind. It is very tempting in its promises and very cruel in its fulfilment (vv. 31, 32). It seems

only beautiful and lovely as it approaches us. The wine is red with a rich color; it sparkles with brilliant bubbles ("it giveth its color in the cup" is literally it giveth "its eye"—that is, it shows beaded bubbles—in the cup); it goeth down the lips smoothly with a pleasant sensation (R. V., for it "moveth itself aright"). No one can say that this old writer did not know what could be said "in praise of wine." All the bacchanal rhapsodies of fanciful and ardent minds from Anacreon down to Robert Ingersoll are presupposed in these realistic words of Proverbs. Yes, the wine does please the eye and the taste. Why deny it? But what of it? "At last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." The pleasure may be real, but so is the payment that must be made for it. No account is balanced until both debit and credit sides are footed up. This is what the old Greeks meant when they said, "Count no man happy until his funeral." The gay drinker may be having his pleasure without doubt, but do not call him a happy man until you see him after he has paid the bill. A man may find it delightful to read without interruption everything he can lay his hands upon. But we do not think him happy when he has ruined his eyesight. Call no pleasure pleasurable until you have asked what the cost is to be. If all there were to wine-drinking were the agreeableness of the act no one would question its delight. But when one remembers that for it he may have to give everything that is worth having, both in this and the future life, how can he bring himself to name it in the class of pleasures at all?

2. The *traits of disposition* which result from wine-drinking are touched upon.

(a) The drunkard is *contentious* (v. 29). Those who undertake the graceless part of defenders of drinking

assert that the greater crimes, such as arson, burglary, conspiracy to murder, are not due to liquor, but on the contrary require cool deliberation; that offences against law which have their rise in drinking are mostly assault and battery and such like. So be it; but notice the curious line of argument: drunkenness is a cause of crime, but not of the greatest crimes, because a drunken man cannot be deliberate, and deliberation is necessary to the greatest crime. That is to say, a drunkard may be in a habitually contentious mood, and in it may murder a man, because the drunkard is not responsible. In other words, all agree that the result of drinking is often a quarrel whose end is death, but it is alleged that this must not be called a great crime, because it was done in drink. That is to say, the cause of the crime is pleaded as its palliation. Could any reasoning be more unreasonable than that which holds out the cup to the man and says, "This cup may lead you to murder; but don't worry, because the murder will not be bad since it is due to the cup"? Contentiousness is a patent outcome of wine. This in itself is bad enough, but in how many cases has it led to that which is most awfully worse!

(b) The drinker is *a discontented man*. He is always complaining (v. 29). It is a joke among drinkers that a man takes whiskey because the weather is too hot, and that he also takes it because it is too cold. The jest touches upon a common characteristic of the drinker—his discontent. Things do not please him, his business goes wrong, his home is too full of cares, his friends disappoint him, life does not offer to him the pleasures he craves; if he has them they are not satisfying, and so on. He says he drinks to drown his discontent. But could it not truly be said of most of such men that their discontent

is the result of their drinking? The drunkard has fastened upon himself voluntarily a craving which cannot possibly be satisfied, which gives restlessness to his whole being.

(c) The drunkard *loses his mind*. For the sake of a passing pleasure he surrenders God's noble gift of intelligence, and for the time submits to being a disgusting imbecile. He imagines that people are beating him, and yet he is not hurt (v. 35). He is no longer able to judge of events; he cannot estimate properly his own feelings; he has sacrificed thought; he has unmanned himself. It is astonishing that the most clever of all our funny papers should derive so much of its funniness from stories of drunken men. Is there anything about a man who has turned himself into a beast that is capable of appealing to any feeling in us but that of shame? We remember hardened criminals who have jested on the scaffold; but we do not laugh at their jests, however witty they may really have been. The disgrace of drunkenness ought to make the finding of fun in it impossible.

(d) The drunkard is a *reckless* man. He has abandoned that discretion which came from God by natural endowment and through experience. All that life could teach him he forsakes, and lives on in wild disregard of conduct's consequences. He is like a man who is so ignorant of seafaring that he lies down to sleep when the ship is sinking in the trough of a tumultuous sea or who goes to sleep on the top of a mast without any thought of the danger of falling (v. 34). Courage in the face of danger is one thing; recklessness is another. The drunkard is reckless. He reasons like the ostrich, who thinks it must be safe because it has buried its head in the sand. Think of the men, flushed with wine, who have staked

everything they had in the world, the inheritance of ancestors, the accumulations of years, upon a single chance at cards; of the men who by drinking have brought all their ordinary sense of honor into such abject subjection that it is nothing to them to keep company with black-legs whom they would scorn to recognize on the street; of men who under a passing fit of anger have been led to murder brothers, fathers, children, wives, because the voice of reason, which would have checked them, had been drowned in drink. What a horrible spectacle it is, this of men abandoning the precious guide given to us by God for the indulgence of the palate for a moment!

3. The *results* of drinking are suggested in part.

(a) The *speech* of the drunkard is bad. His heart utters froward things (v. 33). You expect to find a drunken man full of profanity and indecency. No matter how correct his words may be ordinarily, now he is changed so that you could not believe it if you did not hear it. It would be hard to say why evil speech should accompany drinking. What necessary connection is there between them? Is the evil in the heart, and does the man in his imbecility speak forth his real self? Is he profane because *in vino veritas*? Or does wine give a man unholy lips who in general might be called a good man? Whatever be the cause, the fact is indisputable. Who can forget the time when as a child he saw for the first time a drunken man being arrested? How incomprehensible and shocking were those reckless oaths, those volleys of indecent words! The child's appalled wonder is the proper feeling in view of such a disgraceful scene. Pity is it that any man should outgrow the sense of its disgracefulness.

(b) *The body is harmed* by drink (v. 29). We can

take this in a figurative sense, that the body is wasted and disabled by the internal effects of intemperance; or in the literal sense, that a man who is drunk is apt by his falls, his inability to protect himself from assault, his rushing unconsciously into danger, to expose himself to bruises and hurts which ought not to have come upon him. They are unnecessary wounds, because he might have avoided them. They had no purpose in them, like the wounds of a soldier, which he is willing to risk receiving for the sake of his country. The drunkard's wounds are wounds without a cause. Just as a college commencement was approaching a senior fell down stairs in a drunken stupor and bruised his face badly. He had hard work devising lies to explain his appearance; for his wound was a wound without a cause. Men are sometimes willing to suffer for some adequate end. But who is willing to suffer for nothing? Only the man who has had his judgment taken away by drink.

(c) The drunkard *tends to become possessed of all kinds of evil desires*. His eyes behold strange women (R. V. margin of v. 33). Lusts awaken in him and sway him without a protest which he would have scorned with loathing when sober. How many a man has awakened in a place of shame, hanging his head in disgust with himself, and wholly ignorant of when or how he came thither! The brothel and the saloon always adjoin. The danger of the wine-cup is that it beats down all those restraints upon character which we cultivate and always mean to respect. If the drinker had his wits about him he would not follow those who seduce him into every degrading sin. But the trouble is he has abandoned his wits; he has practically put himself voluntarily at the mercy of any other will that will exert itself over him. And as those in the drinking-

places are usually men of low desires, the drinker readily consents to let vile dispositions dominate him for the time. Why then should he be surprised if he wakes from his drunken sleep to find that he has descended into most despicable sins? He ought rather to be surprised at his voluntarily entering into a resort of evil-minded men and saying in effect, "I intend to abandon my self-respect, my principles, for a time, and I offer myself to you to do with me what you will."

4. This way of living becomes *permanent*. In its origin drunkenness is but an episode; in its conclusion it is a character. What a man does once he tends to do again. Every committal in conduct involves a pledge for the future. A man cannot exempt himself from this law any more than he can exempt himself from breathing as a necessity of life. Every drinker tends to become more of a drinker, whether he desires it or not.

(a) This permanence is shown in the *deliberateness* of the drunkard's full-grown folly. He tarries long at the wine; he spends time and thought, which were meant for better things, in devising new kinds of mixtures wherewith to tickle his palate (v. 30). It is for this reason that the drunkard belongs with the persons called fools in Proverbs. These are not silly weak men who know nothing, but deliberate, cold-blooded sinners against God. A drinker finds himself going to excess and knows he ought to stop; but he is more apt to go on, and to spend thought not on how he can protect himself from falling, but on how he can make his sinning more agreeable.

(b) And so the *habit* fastens itself more and more firmly upon him, until at last, even when he is grovelling in the lowest depths, he still calls ever for more of that which has brought him there. He is longing to awake—

and reform? Not so. In order that he may seek it again (v. 35). The more a man drinks the more he does not want to stop. Moderate drinking will be impossible when men are not governed by the law of habit.

It is not necessary to reason on what we have seen. It is enough to let the horror of it burn itself deeply on our minds.

THE EXCELLENT WOMAN.

PROV. 31:10-31.

“FOR silence and chaste reserve is woman’s genuine praise, and to remain quiet within the house.” So Euripides witnesses to the negative position of woman in the old Greek world. “Fashionable doctors speak and write about two diseases alone; gout they give to men, nervous exhaustion to women.” So writes Lady Catharine Gaskell after describing the multitudinous duties of the society woman of to-day. Where is woman’s place between these two extremes? We might try to answer by asking, What in her has been most admired? from Chaucer in “A Praise of Women,” down to Tennyson’s “Dream of Fair Women.” But the things for which they have been praised have not always been the things for which women ought to have been praised. Or we might turn to that large body of essays which has within a few years occupied so considerably the pages of the English Reviews. We might listen to Mona Caird reviling marriage and to Mrs. Lynn Linton retorting with her arraignment of “The Wild Woman.” What ought woman to be? The Word of God can tell us a good deal about that yet, and to it we turn rather than to the poets and essayists.

We may note three things concerning woman as she is portrayed in the Proverbs.

(1.) Her power both for good and evil is emphasized. She is recognized as important in the social structure. She is not a negligible quantity.

(2.) Her position as portrayed here gives us a high estimate of the life of the Jews as a nation. They were

tenacious of national life in a remarkable degree, and they produced many noble women. The two things are correlated, for it has been well said that you can always tell of a nation's character from the character of its women.

(3.) The Jewish woman was a wife and mother. To her this was what God had planned, therefore to her this seemed the noblest possible position. She had strength of mind and will, but she did not employ them in dislocating God's scheme of human society. She was not a "wild woman," nor was she only a "patient Grisel." She took the place God made for her and filled it excellently, and in that for any one in any place lies the highest success in life.

We are not to assume that the passage in Prov. 31 in praise of woman is to be taken as a complete summary of her virtues, for some of the chief virtues (purity, e. g.) are not named. Nor are we to assume that the space given to the industrial virtues would indicate that the writer intended to exalt them as higher than others that could be named. Some things are assumed and therefore unexpressed, and other things are conspicuously emphasized, perhaps because they needed to be impressed upon the people of that time.

I. The virtue most dealt with is *industry*. The good woman gathers materials for making the household clothing and "her hands joy in work" (v. 13). At great trouble she may have to do this, but no undertaking of the sort is too imposing for her, for she has the vigor of attack of a bold sea-merchant (v. 14).

There is something beautiful in such a ready acceptance of one's lot in life. In these hurrying ambitious days men are full of a restless discontent. They want to

be something other than they are. They project themselves in their dreams into places where they will not have to do what lies upon them now. To escape the burdens of life is their great desire. And if these cannot be escaped and one seems to be destined always to the routine of work, there lies open the door of suicide. The rate of suicide, Morselli tells us, increases with the increase of civilization. Civilization means opportunity. It holds out large prizes to men; it invites them to dream of absence of toil for themselves. But in that way lies not joy. Rather look to this model Hebrew woman accepting with a cheerful and masterly mind the place God has given her, bound to do her best to satisfy its conditions, and so destined to genuine content. A man who does not want to work may succeed in escaping work perhaps, and justify himself before men, many of whom will say, "Neither would we work if we did not have to;" but how can he justify himself before God? How can he eat a crust of bread with a satisfied conscience when he reads the words, "If any will not work, neither let him eat"? To work is God's intention for us, and if we have any thought of wishing to live for Him, work will not be to us an episode so disagreeable that we are to escape from it as soon as possible, but rather that for which we were made and that in which we ought to be most at home.

II. The model woman is *efficient* in the management of her household. The opening of this description of woman is, "Who can find a virtuous woman?" The word virtuous refers not so much to purity as to adaptation to the place where God has put her. The meaning is, "Who can find a capable woman? For her price is far above rubies." Her capability is shown in her addressing herself in strength to the exigencies of her place

(v. 17). In the dark hours of the morning she is up in order to get her maids to work (v. 15)—a very necessary thing in an Oriental country, where midday is no time for labor. She watches her servants that they do not slight their tasks (v. 27). And as a result of her efficiency her household do not worry about being provided for against winter (v. 21), nor is she without due apparel for herself (v. 22). In confident knowledge of her wise care she may laugh at the future (v. 25).

It requires wisdom to do anything well. Watch the stone-mason laying a wall, the clerk doing up a bundle, the girl dusting a room. If these are good workmen in their several occupations, you will see every moment the result of intelligence applied to the accomplishment of even the humblest task. It is precisely the same thing that makes a great general or a great statesman; it is mastering intelligence applied to the details of his work. The necessity of this efficient dealing with our duties makes valid the proverb, "What's worth doing at all is worth doing well." The ideal woman uses her good sense to advantage in the management of the home. Home duties are not slighted in order that that intelligence may exert itself upon books or art or society or anything else whatever. But it is assumed that nothing is more worthy of one's most acute thought than the inconspicuous duties of the home. Let a man exert faithfully his reason on his work, and success will come. Let a woman spend the best energies of her mind on her home, and that home will be a success. Husband and children will not fly from it to be amused elsewhere; but they will love to be in it (as she herself will love to be in it) because it will satisfactorily answer the home-longing, one of the deepest wants of the human heart.

III. This ideal woman is full of *enterprise*. She sees a field that can be used to advantage and buys it; she plants vineyards (v. 16); she manages exchanges of merchandise (v. 18); she makes linen and girdles beyond her household needs and sells them to the passing trader (v. 24). This shows the Oriental woman in an unusual light. We have thought of her, even among the Jews, as having nothing to do outside the home; but here we see her portrayed as doing a thriving business, as making exchanges and buying property, and so increasing her husband's wealth. There is something very homely and natural in this portrait of the thrifty housewife turning an honest penny when occasion offers. This is the overflow of her exuberant interest in the prosperity of her household. It is not for herself she does these things, not to get a name for success in something not natural to women, not to get money to squander on herself. No, the enterprise she shows points us back to the home: it is for this she does all her shrewd thinking. The home still is the theatre of her life, and these excursions into the world all derive excellence from her recognition of their subserviency to her life-work—that of making home blessed for all in it. She recognizes but one calling in life; this she tries to fulfil to the utmost, and so strenuously that the world outside is levied upon by her active brain and made a helper to her in her one purpose. Her business enterprise is thus not a sign of her seeking new interests outside of the home, but on the contrary a sign of her greater devotion to it. Home over everything, everything for the home, is her idea. No wonder the Hebrew nation had the strongest home-feeling of any in ancient history.

IV. With all this, the ideal woman is *sympathetic*. She does not forget the poor (v. 20). She may have a

vigorous mind, which makes her rule her household well and watch eagerly and sharply after its interests. But these things do not make her a hard, calculating person of business. She is still a woman, full of sympathy for the unfortunate, ready to help the unsuccessful. The calculating business instinct we have seen in her might lead us to expect that she would not be susceptible to the call of suffering. But her business-like qualities are redeemed and glorified because they all centre in the home. Back of the calculating mind lies the warm throbbing heart, thrilled with the highest emotions. That warm love of the home, that watchful solicitude for all the wants of those in it, young and old, make her feel it when any one lacks anything. She has thought and worked so hard that her household might not suffer, that when some one not in her home comes before her in want she acts as she would act if it were one of her household, and reaches forth her hand in relief. What a necessary modification this is of the frugal care of those one loves. We must not love even them selfishly. A hard-saving man once bought a house, and from that moment refused to let his wife or himself give a penny away until his house was paid for. That may have been the kind of charity which begins at home, but it was not Christ's charity. Rowland Hill may have done well when he forbade any one in the congregation to give who had n't paid his debts. But no man, for the sake of personal comfort, ought to incur such debts as will prevent his giving to others. The days on which a man cannot give are surely dark days in life.

V. The ideal woman is *wise* of speech (v. 26). She is the counsellor of the household, giving good advice and teaching them that kindness which is life's truest wisdom. And there is no place where a deeper wisdom is

needed than in the home. The easy running of home affairs makes a great difference in the happiness of everybody. What skill, what tact, what insight into dispositions, what knowledge of ways and means is required that this end may be secured. Moreover, home is where the character of the children is being formed. How quickly the pettishness or unreason or frivolity of the mother is reflected in the child! If her judgments of conduct, the conduct she sees before her in the home, are the products of inconsiderate impulse or unwise social custom or indifference to good, the child's ideals of life are set low. But if she "sees life clearly and sees it whole," if she looks beyond upon the wide stretch of eternity, if there is in her heart truly that wisdom which cometh from above, then the child's vision rises and stretches out to a wide horizon. The widest empire does not offer a more dignified throne for the exercise of high wisdom than the mother's seat in the home.

The results of such a good woman's life are visible.

(a) She has a happy *husband*. His heart trusts her; he knows that his home will be well taken care of; he gets from her only blessing (vv. 11, 12). He is constrained to praise her (v. 28). And when he goes out into public life to perform there the duties of a citizen, the blessedness of having a good wife goes with him and adds special grace and dignity to his position (v. 23).

(b) She has appreciative *children*. They rise up and call her blessed (v. 28). God has so arranged the relation of parent and child that there shall be a predisposition to affection, whether it is merited or not. The boy still has some admiration and attachment for the father who unjustly beats him. There is a natural affection in every heart. But how much more tender this is

when it has justified itself, when thoughtful solicitude, careful wisdom, dignity and honesty and sincerity, win a second love from the heart. Love with honor is the best love of all, and this the true mother has from her children.

(c) She has a *good name* (v. 31). Her work stands for itself, and all recognize its worth. She may or may not have beauty (v. 30), but her fear of the Lord gives her something for which many a woman would give all loveliness of face and every other possession: she has respect from those about her.

May God through this lesson give to many a girlish heart a new dream—not of fair, but—of good women, that shall reproduce itself in a strong, gentle, wise life.

REVERENCE AND FIDELITY.

ECCLES. 5 : 1-12.

THE book of Ecclesiastes tells the story of one who tried to satisfy his soul with many things incapable of satisfying it, such as pleasure, riches, splendor of life, and study, who at last sought the fear of the Lord and in that found the only thing which could give rest to his heart.

In the first four chapters the story of the wandering of his soul has been told. With chapter five begins a series of proverbial sayings somewhat like those of the book of Proverbs, but showing more internal connection. These represent some of the experimental knowledge which had come to the heart in its chase after many things. It is not necessary that we should study them in connection with the rest of the book, but we may use them, as we do the Proverbs, as condensations of wisdom, each having a completeness in itself. These wise sayings group themselves under three heads.

I. *Worship* (vv. 1-7). "Take care when thou goest to the temple or synagogue to worship God. For drawing near to hear is better than offering meaningless sacrifices like fools. For they do not know, they are thoughtless in their worship, so that they do evil in it (v. 1). Be not in haste with thy mouth in worship, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter a saying before God ; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth ; therefore let thy words be few (v. 2). For, as the popular saying goes, when a man has a multitude of affairs, there comes a dream, and when there are a multitude of words, there is a fool (v. 3).

When thou vowest a vow to God do not delay in performing it: for there is no delight to God in those foolish persons who are quick to vow but slow to perform. That which thou vowest, keep (v. 4). It is good not to vow rather than to vow and not keep (v. 5). Suffer not thy mouth to cause thyself to sin by such trivial vows, and say not before the messenger of God, the priest, when thou comest with an offering to get release from thy vow, that it was a mistake. Why shouldest thou act thus thoughtlessly so that God should be angry at thy petitioning voice and destroy the work of thy hands? (v. 6). For in many dreams there are vanities; and also in many words. But fear thou God (v. 7).” A free translation of this sort may perhaps answer to deal with the many difficulties of the passage in the smallest space.

(a) The proper *manner* of worship is here suggested to us. It must be with a full intention of the heart and not merely with the outward symbols. The danger of ritualism is here noted: that the ceremonial will be elaborate while the meaning is naught. Ceremonial had its place in the infancy of religion. It was given by God to his people when they were intellectually unable to worship without external suggestions and mementos. But the same God who gave it, in his providence at last withdrew it, when his people had passed from their religious infancy and were able to think of spiritual things without difficulty. And now that it is gone is the danger that always went with it gone too? Surely not. Our reading the Bible, going to church, prayers, religious talks, may be as empty as those old ceremonies might have been empty. Always in worship, even when it is most freed of external props, there is the opportunity for a lack of right intention, and therefore a lack of meaning to God as well as to men.

Even a heathen could see as much in relation to his worship as Plumptre reminds us was true of Lucretius :

“ True worship is not found in veiled heads
Turned to a statue, nor in drawing near
To many an altar, nor in form laid low
Upon the ground, nor sprinkling it with blood
Of bulls and goats, nor piling vows on vows.”

Worship must always be interpreted by the condition of heart of the worshipper. If this had been remembered the fearful abuses of the fox-hunting parsons of England in the last century would not have been possible.

Thought is necessary to due worship (v. 1). Fools fancy that the offering of sacrifices is all that is necessary, but they weary God with them, because they have no meaning to themselves. To draw near to hear is far better than such perfunctory service. We sometimes feel that there must be some virtue in our having used the exertion necessary to betake ourselves to church. We congratulate ourselves that we have fulfilled a pious duty. But what if our thoughts have wandered into trivial subjects ; what if we have failed to catch the meaning of hymn, prayer, and sermon ; what if while God was waiting for us to offer him some high feeling of adoration, we have deprived him of that which he had a right to expect from us in such a place ? It would be a good thing for every one of us if we would ask ourselves as we pass through the portals of God's house, “ Do I really mean to worship God this hour ? ” If we cannot say yes, would it not be better for us not to enter ?

Deliberateness is necessary to acceptable worship (v. 2). There is no need of hurrying with God. If we absolutely cannot collect ourselves in the time we have, to give him quiet and meaningful thoughts, he will wait. But

we must not keep him waiting for ever for that which is his due from us. We must put away the things of the world and make time, at any expense, for satisfactory worship of God. Labor is a kind of worship doubtless, but God asks more, and every man can give more if he will. To be rash with our mouth, to rattle off a formula, however well constructed, without weighing the meaning, this is not to please God. Suppose a man taking time to think over his own life and his relation to God. Let us say at the end of an hour the desire to call upon God rises in his heart. He bows before God and tells him just the truth about himself and asks God for just what he feels he needs for himself, calmly, deliberately; would not such a prayer please God more than a voluble utterance that occupied the whole hour at the expense of deliberation? Surely one second of the thoughtful, deliberate prayer would mean more than the whole hour of brainless volubility.

Brevity is a virtue in worshipful utterance. God is high above us; we are here in a position that should make us most deeply respectful towards him. We should use well-weighed words before him, and well-weighed words are few. The Scotchman who prayed for an hour without cessation was making reasons for praying, not finding them. The touching prayers of the Bible—the publican's, Christ's on the cross, Saul's at his conversion—were brief. "Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High; whom although to know be life, and joy to make mention of his name, yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him not as indeed he is, neither can know him; and our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, when we confess without confession that his glory is inexplicable,

his greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above, and we upon earth ; therefore it behooveth our words to be wary and few." (Hooker.)

(b) *Vows* formed a considerable element in the old Jewish worship and are more or less recognized in the New Testament. If they were to be used at all, certainly they ought to be used with the same fulness of intention and meaning that one should give to any kind of worship. The making of vows was not obligatory. They were entirely free-will offerings to God. So much the less value had they if they were not respected to the utmost by him who made them. The parallel to us is found (aside from special promises made to God to be fulfilled in case of recovery from sickness, etc.) in our obligations as members of the church. We promise to do certain things : to be faithful to Christ and his church, to love our fellow-Christians, to obey those who are over us in Christ, etc. These are vows, pledges given to God, and they should be kept as scrupulously as we would keep a business obligation signed with our own hand.

When such vows are made they *must be kept* (v. 4, 5). Not to keep them is to add one more to our unfulfilled obligations Godward, and that in a peculiarly flagrant way, because we were not compelled to make the vow, but made it only out of gratitude to God. To promise a gift and then to withhold it is certainly an aggravated form of personal offence. If one feels for any reason regret that he has made promises to God, he should not withdraw from them, but try to reproduce that high feeling which induced him to make them, and this will prompt him to fulfilment.

Excuses alleged as reasons why we may abandon vows are not valid. It might be "the case of one who

desired to be freed entirely from his rash vow, or of one willing to offer up some lesser sacrifice in lieu of a larger, promised in a moment of rashness." But such an attempt to escape from obligations could not be countenanced by the minister of God (v. 6). Better is it surely not to take obligations upon ourselves than to take them and not keep them. But if one finds that he has taken them, what then? Ask God to make them full of meaning to you and to help you to keep them with a glad heart.

II. A difficult passage concerning *State-craft* follows. The State may be mismanaged, but it is wisest to make the best of it. "If thou seest oppression of the poor and violation of justice and righteousness in the government of a province, be not astonished at the matter. Such perversion of state-craft is not confined to the petty officials whose deeds you know. Clear up to the top of the Government it is apt to be the same. For there is a high one over a high one watching, and higher persons over them, and all are pretty much alike (v. 8). But the advantage of a land in every way is a king devoted to the field" (v. 9). The idea here is that the old simple agricultural form of government was the best for the people of that day. The general meaning is that good government comes from having rulers who are not rapacious for their own aggrandizement, but have the interests of the country at heart. The passage is full of suggestions.

We see that the danger of office is everywhere the same. Power is full of peril for any man. The old satraps wrung treasure out of their subjects with torture. The bosses of to-day get rich on taxes and jobs. Human nature persists in its weaknesses through the ages.

But there are rulers who have the interest of the

country at heart and who rule not for their own profit but unselfishly. The world is not wholly bad.

But even if it be very bad indeed at times, one must not be surprised or disheartened. Fleeing from the world is cowardice. The best way is to stay in it and do what we can for its blessing. It may not be in our day, but in some day the good shall certainly triumph.

III. The matter of *riches*, which requires such special thought to-day, when riches come easily and to many, was not without its importance in the olden time.

Wealth then as now was *unsatisfying* (v. 10). It held out promises which it had no power to fulfil. It said to men, "Be rich and you will be happy." They became rich, but they were not happy. If there is one teaching in Ecclesiastes more prominent than another it is this—that wealth cannot quiet the cravings of the soul, that is, neither wealth nor the things that wealth can buy. And it is easy to see why this must be. The soul is made to crave the most ethereal kind of food; but the rich man tries to satisfy it with coarse things. It is made to hunger for the things of heaven; he thrusts upon it the things of earth. The food he presses upon it is not related to its appropriating organs. It is as though one should try to feed meat to a humming-bird.

Here also is emphasized the thought that *the increase* of wealth is not satisfying (v. 11). Our finely discriminating thought to-day makes a distinction between the pleasure of the getting of wealth and the pleasure of having it. The former is said to be the higher. But this getting of wealth for the mere beholding of it is not considered as a pleasure for a moment by the wise author of Ecclesiastes. Exercise for exercise's sake is never as healthful as exercise for some worthy purpose. The dis-

satisfied money-getter is well portrayed in a famous passage of Horace :

“Sleepless thou gazest on thy heaped-up bags,
And yet art forced to hold thy hand from them,
As though they were too sacred to be touched
Or were but painted pictures for thine eyes.”

PLUMPTRE.

And then comes the old lesson, which many a rich man has confessed to be true, but which those who are not rich find it very hard to believe true, that labor with contentment is better than wealthy idleness (v. 12). Many a successful millionaire has confessed that his happiest hours were in the beginning of his career, when he felt that he must work hard for his wife and babies, and when he returned home at night with a sweet sense of contented fatigue that never comes now in his anxious days of great prosperity.

“And to conclude, the shepherd’s homely curds,
His cold thin drink out of his leathern bottle,
His wonted sleep under a fresh tree’s shade,
All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,
Is far beyond a prince’s delicates,
His viands sparkling in a golden cup,
His body couchéd in a curious bed,
When care, mistrust, and treason wait on him.”

THE CREATOR REMEMBERED.

ECCLES. 12:1-7, 13, 14.

THE book of Ecclesiastes sets before us the struggle of a heart, seeking after truth, to satisfy itself. Many expedients are tried, experiments of many sorts are undertaken, but at last the end is reached which might have been foreseen from the beginning: that the only satisfactory life for man is that which is in obedience to God. To us this may seem a very simple matter, not needing much demonstration. But if we will follow "the preacher" through his wanderings of heart as they are powerfully set forth in this book, the conclusion will be as uplifting as the view from the mountain top which rewards one for his hours of climbing. The outlook from Mt. Washington means more to those who reach it by the Bridle Path than to those who attain it by the easy route of "Jacob's Ladder." The outlook at the close of Ecclesiastes is inspiring, but to feel its full inspiration one needs to have followed the vagaries of thought set forth in the book.

At the close of the preceding chapter three thoughts have been set forth: 1st, life will soon end; 2nd, get out of it what you can; 3d, remember God.

In the passage before us this third thought is taken up and pressed home on the heart of youth. There goes with it an elaborate and beautifully poetic description of that old age which tells of life's approaching end, and which warns us that we must be about what we want to do.

But how shall we understand the description of age? Is it an allegory describing the weakening of the body?

Is it a description of the Jews in captivity? Is it a dirge from some old book of hymns? The meanings given to it are innumerable, some of them most absurd. Dean Bradley speaks of some of them as "the long-drawn anatomical explanations of men who would replace with a dissector's report, a painter's touch, a poet's melody." As for instance when the Talmud explains the "watchers" to be the ribs, etc. Rising up at the voice of the bird, is thought by some to mean early rising. Others make the days of youth to be the time of Israel's prosperity as a nation, and the evil days to be the time of exile. Many commentators have understood the blossoming of the almond tree to refer to the whitening hair of age.

The best explanation seems this: first, the preacher describes old age as a stormy day; secondly, the figure changes to that of a palace going to ruin; then there is a reference to "the seven evil days" of spring in the Orient, which are thought particularly dangerous to the aged; and lastly the new figures of the lamp, the fountain, and the cistern come in. It is surely no strange thing to illustrate an idea with a variety of pictures.

"Remember your great Creator in the flower of your life, before the days of evil, the days of age, come (that tell that the opportunity to remember him will soon be past), and years approach of which you will say, 'Not to me is in them pleasure:' before (the day of storms comes, when) the sun is darkened, and the light, and the moon, and the stars; and the clouds keep returning after the pouring rain." Age is here likened to a tempestuous day, when, no sooner is one shower past, than the clouds gather for another. The figure now changes; the body is pictured as a noble palace slowly turning into a ruin. The guards grow weak with age. In the great kitchens

where the women used to make a loud noise grinding grain with the hand-mills common in the East, now only one or two old servants feebly work. In the halls where once choruses of girls chanted songs and moved in circling dances, there is now silence. All this is a striking illustration of the gradual loss of natural power as life grows old. "In the day when the keepers of the house (the hands and arms) tremble; and the men of strength (the legs) bow themselves; and the grinding-maids (the teeth) cease because they are few; and the ladies who look out through the lattices (the eyes) are darkened; and the doors (the ears) are shut towards the street, so that the sound of the grinding of the women is low. When the voice rises to be like the sparrow's (so weak and shrill is it) and all the daughters of song (the words) are brought low. Also the aged fear on account of that which is high (it is hard for them to step up to it); and all sorts of terrors are in the way (so that they are afraid to go out)."

The fears of the aged are increased during what the Orientals call the seven evil days, at the breaking up of their winter, from about February 25 to March 3. The spring is just beginning. The almond trees are putting forth their blossoms and the locusts are crawling out half-benumbed. The weather is uncertain and stormy, and there is especial danger to the feeble in health. "Then the almond tree blossoms and the locust crawls forth and drags itself along. Then the poor soul of man fails; for man is going to his eternal home in the hereafter, and the mourners go about in the street." Here the picture of the close of man's life is complete, with the mention of the lament over his death. But once more it is taken up in a new group of figures. Remember your

great Creator "before the silver cord be snapped asunder, and the golden bowl be broken." Life is likened here most beautifully to a swinging lamp, whose gilded bowl is hung from the top of a tent by a silver cord. The writer next thinks of it as a pitcher carried by some one to the spring for water; and again as a wheel used to draw water from the cistern. Before "the pitcher is shattered beside the spring, and the wheel breaks and falls into the cistern, and before the dust returns unto the earth, as it was, and the spirit returns unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanity, says the preacher, all is vanity."

What follows has been called the epilogue which contains a justification and summing up of the book. The conclusion of all the preacher's wanderings in search of the right way to live is plainly stated: "The end of the matter is, all that can be said having been heard: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is for every man (it is the universal law of human life." But why should we care to know it?) "Because God shall bring every work into judgment, together with every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

We may make a regular progression of the lessons taught in this exquisitely beautiful passage.

1. There is a hereafter. Man is not made only for this life. What would we think of the pyramid builders if they scattered pyramids over a plain, but intentionally left every one of them unfinished, with the lines sloping together so as to prophesy of an apex which was never built? Such designed incompleteness is inconceivable, the human mind being what it is. No more can we conceive of God's having scattered over the world all the beautiful and noble lives in history, yet so that none of them should be complete. There must be a finishing

sometime. The converging lines of character prophesy of a consummation sometime. It is not now, for death cuts the building short; it must be hereafter. We do not find in Ecclesiastes reasoning to prove that there is a hereafter; that is left for this sophisticated age of doubt. When man thinks naturally, the thought of a world to come rises spontaneously in his heart. We are made so as to expect it. We have an organ whose function it is to anticipate it. And that organ of the heart would be as inexplicable without a hereafter as an eye without light. Where we find eyes we can presume the existence of light at sometime.

2. Man is a responsible being. He can do pretty much as he pleases, but he cannot by any possibility exempt himself from the consequences of what he does. He may feel no very great results from his wrong-doing in this life, but "after death the judgment." Sometime the score must be settled. When the wicked flourish, those who are weak are tempted to think that there is something wrong in the constitution of the universe. But call no man prosperous until his account is settled with God. There may be some things to be paid then, towards which his earthly prosperity would not be as a penny in the dollar. The feeling of "oughtness" arises in every human soul. The ought means obligation, and obligation implies a person to whom it is owed, one who can and will reward according to one's recognition of the ought. Conscience inevitably points to God, and with God left out it is inexplicable and meaningless. Therefore we are without excuse if we do wrong and hope not to have to settle for it. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." That *shall* is built upon the impregnable foundation of the eternal being of God.

3. Death ends man's work on earth. The approach of death is most beautifully described in the passage before us, but that does not conceal for a moment that it is death, and the end of labor. "Whatsoever a man intends doing he should be about quickly, is the lesson. It is interesting to note that the terrors of death are not dwelt upon in the passage. The sombreness, the pain of it, are passed by. If the writer were uninspired, we should call this a fine mark of literary restraint. Writers often gloat over death, they force the melancholy of it home upon our hearts, they seem to say (as Dickens is accused of saying in effect in describing the death of little Nell) "Now let us have a cry together." There is not the slightest touch of this in the ending of Ecclesiastes. It seems to me as though the writer said to us with refined dignity, "Let us draw the sheet over the dying man's face; let us not abuse feeling by purposely dwelling on what is harrowing, when it is to no good end; but let us not forget that the man is dead and his life-work is over." If we have any plans for good, if we want to make this life a preparation for the glories of the future, how busy ought the thought, and the sight, of death to make us.

4. Reverent obedience to God is the only method of having a life that shall be worth living. Inasmuch as we have not constituted the laws of destiny, and inasmuch as we cannot change them or prevent their application to ourselves, the only course that is not entirely irrational is to accept them, and conform ourselves to them so as to secure blessing and not harm. God changes not and we need not hope to change him. He is a God of love always, but his love brings blessing only to those who seek to do his will. To those who disregard him that same love becomes a condemnation.

But how shall we keep God's laws? Above all commands, he has given to us our final command, by keeping which we are led to keep all the rest; "this is my beloved Son; hear ye him." It is folly to try to keep God's commands while neglecting this last and greatest of them all, which indeed is intended to be the means of keeping all the rest. From the time Christ came into the world, the Christian life was the only acceptable life of obedience to God. Thenceforth obedience and Christian faith were the same. Therefore trying to serve God while rejecting Christ must lead to failure in God's eyes.

5. Youth is the best time to begin serving God. This is the impressive meaning of the elaborate practical description of old age and death in our passage. The length to which this is drawn must not hold our attention so closely upon the details that we shall miss the meaning of the whole. And what is that meaning? That youth is the time to begin the service of God. For several plain reasons.

(a) It is easier to begin then. Habits are unformed, and will as easily take one shape as another. Once they are made, rearrangement comes only as it were by fracture. Young people are led into the church more easily than old people. Should the church abandon that advantage to Satan? He does not hesitate to take advantage of youthful susceptibility, though he sometimes, with a sublime inconsistency possible only to the prince of evil, suggests to some doubting minds in the church that it is wrong for Christ to take the same advantage. The church, standing as God's earthly fold, has properly had a place in it always for the young, both in the old economy and the new. But some one says, may not young Christians fail to understand all there is to Christianity? There are

several elements in the reply : a child-Christian is a Christian in as legitimate a way as an adult Christian, for it is not a question of quality but of age only ; the danger is not in child-Christianity for children, but in child-Christianity for men ; the workers in the church in great majority came from those who became Christ's early in life. By their fruits shall ye know them.

(b) It is important to have the trend of life settled in favor of the good. You cannot do this except at the needless expense of great moral upheaval, at any time but in the early years.

(c) The more years of life consecrated to Christ, the more the quantity of good which can be done for him. Every year away from his service is an empty year from the point of view of eternity. The product of life is not wholly a matter of quantity, but it is somewhat so.

(d) The earlier one begins in the Christian life the longer time he has for Christian growth. As life closes we begin to wish that we had more time to develop. Heaven needs so much better preparation than we in our haste can make for it. The better way is to remember our Creator in the days of our youth.

PAUL CALLED TO EUROPE.

ACTS 16:6-15.

A ROUGH sea looks rougher when one looks down upon it than when he looks across it. The point of view makes a difference in many things. To Paul the passage from Troas to Neapolis was not different from the passage from Seleucia to Cyprus. Both were journeys in the interest of the gospel. But to us the Neapolitan voyage marks the beginning of the territorial evangelization of the civilized world. Greeks and Romans had doubtless been converted before this, but in their alien homes in Asia. Or if the Church of Rome had been started before this time, it was by the return of Romans who had been found out by the gospel while visiting on foreign soil. But when Paul crossed the Ægean there began a pointed and purposeful attempt to win a new continent for Christ. And the winning of that continent meant a Christianized Greece, a Christianized Rome, a Christianized Germany, France, England, and America. Dull Asia had heard the gospel. Now it was brought to that Europe which has furnished to the world its civilized energy. Probably in Paul's mind the European passage was but one of many journeys. But to the eye of history, seeing before and after, it was the challenge of Christianity to civilization, to intellect, to world-controlling energy, to come and be ruled by Christ.

Before this journey, however, there went

I. *The time of waiting.* Proconsular Asia and Bithynia were before Paul and his companions; they were without the gospel; they needed it; Paul was ready to give

it. And yet the gospel was not preached. It was not a time to labor, but a time to wait.

1. Yet it was a time of endeavor to labor. Paul did not choose the waiting for himself. He honestly and earnestly tried to preach the gospel. The same obligation pressed upon him that made him always say to himself, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." He strenuously tried to satisfy that obligation without demission. He went to the frontier of the province of Asia Minor intending to enter and preach. Prevented there, he tried Bithynia next. The presupposition of Paul's life was this gospelizing obligation. His conversion was interpreted by it; his experience of Christ's grace always seemed to bear specially upon it. Preaching was the one word that summed up all Paul's life. And he did preach everywhere and always so far as he was able. Every Christian is called to work. His mission in life is to proclaim Jesus Christ. How hard and how constantly do we try to fulfil it?

2. Paul's endeavor to do his work was thwarted. He wanted to labor for Christ, and he was prevented from doing so. We think sometimes of Paul's life (when we recall how very much was accomplished in it) as a sort of triumphal progress. But it was not so. He knew many a failure. He went into many a place only to be driven out with stones. He planned great journeys and found himself in prison. It would be a very instructive thing to look over the Scriptural records of Paul's life and tabulate the thwarted plans recorded. No man makes every Christian endeavor he undertakes a success. As God makes the flower cast many a seed to the ground that one or two plants may spring up, so he gives it as a law of spiritual accomplishment that there shall sometimes be

many failures to one success. And Paul, like a wise man, did not quarrel with law.

3. The strange part of Paul's experience at this point was that the thwarting of his purpose to preach the gospel in proconsular Asia and Bithynia was directly due to God. Some of Paul's failures were due to the interference of Satan (see 1 Thess. 2 : 18), who we may believe goes about endeavoring to hinder God's people in God's work. But this time God himself withheld Paul from the accomplishment of his life-work. It is strange that the very God who devised the gospel, who wanted it offered to all men, and who had called and commanded Paul to spend his life in making that offer, should seem to be preventing the accomplishment of his own plan. What are we to think of this? (a) God was leading Paul away from the conversion of Asia Minor to the conversion of Europe. Paul, having but one human life and one man's natural power, could not do both. God set before him the larger work. To accomplish it involved the exclusion of the smaller. In the same way Christ preached not except to Israel. To have crossed to other nations would have frittered away the three years in an enterprise too large for them. (b) Asia Minor was undoubtedly approached more advantageously by the gospel from the westward, when the weight of European success added a new commendation to Paul's teaching, which it lacked when it came from the eastward. If you want to win a man to anything it is better to await the favorable moment than to rush in at first sight. It was better for Asia Minor and Bithynia not to have the gospel preached to them just yet. (c) God's thwarting of Paul's plans would have been all right even if we could see no reason whatever in it. Many a time we have no understanding of the ways

of our Father. We cannot explain all. His paths are secret. "And so there is nothing better than to yield full power to God, that his grace may show honor to, or withhold from men, according as it seems good" (Calvin). Therefore when God frustrates the Christian's work for good, he need not feel that he is driven to suppose that the universe is somehow out of gear.

4. The Holy Spirit was present with Paul, directing and equipping him, quite as well in the time of waiting as in the time of work.

II. *The call.* Paul had found his intentions foiled; Asia Minor and Bithynia were closed to him; Europe remained. Should he seek those shores? He needed direction, and it was given. The vision of the Macedonian, perhaps authenticated as from God in some way unknown to us, showed Paul where his labor lay.

1. The vision was that of a pleading man. He stood and besought Paul to come over to Macedonia with help. Doubtless behind Paul were beseeching Asia Minor and Bithynia. Macedonia was not alone in this attitude. For that matter, all the world was in crying need of the gospel. The vision did not mean that Macedonia was more in need, but that it was open. Paul did not discriminate in his desire to help men. Macedonia was no more to him than any other country; it was no less. All the world needed Christ, and Paul was debtor to both Greek and Jew. The gospel is for the world, and the whole world.

2. The figure in the vision voiced the need of help; it did not define just what was needed. The call that rises from the human race is a cry for help, whatever the help be. It is not always a cry for the gospel; for many times when the gospel is offered it is blindly refused. But just the same, if men only knew it, the gospel is the

only possible answer to their self-confessed sense of undescribed need. The picture of the pleading nations crying to us for the gospel is true as expressive of their need, but it is not always true as expressive of their desire. The world is hardened, dead in sin, and sometimes does not believe it. It is the function of the gospel sometimes to create desire as well as to satisfy it. When Paul landed in Macedonia he found no crowd standing with outstretched hands to welcome him. No, he "tarried certain days" before there was any sign of the gospel being wanted, and then the sign came only to Paul's search for it.

3. The Macedonian was a representative. He said, not "come over and help me," but "come over and help us." All needed Christ, and not only the few souls who were already near to the kingdom—like Lydia, the first convert.

4. The request that was made by the pleading man of the vision was in Paul's power to grant. He could go over and help them if he wanted to. So can we help the nations who seem to stand before us in vision beseeching us to help them. We may have no warmer welcome with them than Paul had in indifferent Macedonia, and yet their need is just as crying. They may seem to need archangels rather than men to summon them out of their spiritual sleep, yet we have the same message to carry that Paul carried, the same power of speech he had, and with us is the same Spirit to give blessing. We are able to answer the nations' need if we want to.

III. *The answer.*

1. Paul was led to make an answer by using the mind God had given him. He and his companions consulted together and "concluded that God had called them for to

preach the gospel unto them." The supernatural vision seems to separate Paul's experience from ours. We are not so led in our work. But his consulting with his friends and reasoning out as well as he could the conclusion which God wanted him to make, brings his way of being led back into similarity with our own. And assuredly if we behold the real though not miraculous vision of the pleading nations to-day, and if we seek as well as we can to think out what we should do in view of it, we shall be led aright (Jas. 1 : 5).

2. Having made up his mind that he ought to go to Macedonia, Paul "sought" to carry out that purpose. That he succeeded was not his accomplishment but God's, who ruleth the winds and the waves and directeth all men's paths. Strictly Paul did not succeed, but tried to succeed, which is neither more nor less than we can do in view of God's work. Assurance of success and the accomplishment of success are in God's hands, but we can at least try. If God is willing to bless, and we are able at least to try, if Christian work sometimes does not greatly prosper, what is the reason?

3. Paul's answer to the meaning of the vision was immediate. "Straightway we sought to go." The reaction of Paul's converted soul in the presence of spiritual need was instant. We might almost say it was automatic, did we not know that his own will had much to do with it, as we learn by contrasting him with other men. We speak of men sometimes as being persons whose hearts respond easily to the appeals of others. But they respond because they want to respond. No man is virtuous in any direction because he cannot help it. Or to put it a better way, even the divine constraint in the converted soul is successful only because of the consent of the will, which

by renewal is made one with God's. Paul, then, was not unlike us. If he responded instantly to the call of need we can respond so too, if we will.

4. The call's being from God was what made Paul's reply so quick. Like Christ, his Master, he referred all things to his Father's will, and once that became evident, the matter was settled. Obedience was a primal element in Paul's religious life, and so he is seen to be truly of the company of Him who was "an obedient Son."

IV. *The result.*

1. It was not visible at once. Over in Troas there was the exciting vision of the pleading Macedonian. But in Macedonia there was nothing but indifference. Paul and his friends came to the city unheralded and unnoticed. They tarried several days with nothing done. Where was the spiritual interest, where were the earnest seekers after truth Paul might perhaps not unjustly have thought himself entitled to expect? He was received, as the missionary of the cross is almost always received, with perfect indifference.

2. Paul used means to bring a result about. He did not sit down with folded hands, saying to himself, "Macedon has cried to me for help; I have come a long way at great trouble in order to give help: now if the Macedonians want me let them speak out." Paul assumed that the Macedonians needed everything and acted as though they desired nothing. He waited not for them to seek him, he sought them. And here he followed his usual method of procedure. He sought the Jews out first. He waited until the Sabbath, and then went to the river-bank where the Jews had an open-air place of prayer. There he talked with a few women who came out to worship. This surely did not look like a very vigorous attack on

intrenched heathenism. But Paul was a strategist. As a result finally of his plan at Philippi came forth what in many ways was Paul's most successful church. It would never have been known if Paul, conscious of God's blessing, had not worked for it. Work is a spiritual as well as a natural condition of success.

3. A small beginning was made. Paul was not disheartened at its smallness, but content with its being a beginning. No heathen were allured to the gospel at all. No men were reached. One woman, and she half converted already before Paul's appearance, was the harvest of Paul's effort. What an insignificant result after the double injunction in Asia, the vision, the long journey, the high expectations of spiritual conquest! One lone woman! And yet there stands in history the glorious church of Philippi, most blessed of all the works of God and Paul. Let no man despise the day of small things. The beginning is not yet the end, but it surely has the end hidden in it, in however small circumference.

4. Fellowship was established. Lydia brought her household into the faith and took Paul and his friends into the sweet communion of this new Christian home. When that Christian fellowship was formed the success of Paul's Philippian mission was assured. A group of real Christian friends can leaven a city.

V. Lessons concerning missionary work.

1. The relation of God and man in gospelizing.

God calls; man's imperative and immediate duty is to obey. We are allowed deliberation as to what the will of God is, but not as to what we will do about it when we know it.

God sends the Holy Spirit to direct and empower in Christian work. Nevertheless it is man's duty to work to

his utmost for the accomplishment of God's plan. "For it is God that worketh in you."

God sends us to try all plans in the world with his gospel. He only knows where we shall succeed in planting it.

2. *The laws of gospelizing.* Persuading for Christ is like other persuading. Paul did not preach when he made his first European convert. What a spectacle he would have made if he had proceeded to deliver a thunderous oration like that on Mars' Hill to these half dozen women! He sat down and talked with them.

The gospel begins its work in small ways. There were only a handful of apostles. Europe's conquest for Christ is heralded in the saving of one woman.

The gospel uses the God-made relations of human life for its propagation. Lydia brought her household to Christ. The family is recognized and utilized by the gospel. Marriage, friendship, even casual acquaintance, have thus in them the potency of spiritual blessing.

PAUL AT PHILIPPI.

ACTS 16:19-34.

THE opening of Paul's European tour did not promise well. There was no one to meet him with open arms, like the man of Macedonia in the vision. There was no apparent yearning for the gospel. When Paul went to seek out those who were religiously inclined he found only women. One of these was converted—but she had already been a seeker after God. If Paul's mission had been only to the pious Jews scattered here and there over the Roman empire the conversion of Europe would have seemed almost hopeless. Was he to have no conversions among that great mass of the people who were not ready for the gospel and were indifferent to all religious life? The conversion of good Jews bore about the same relation to the conversion of the Roman people as the Christianization of the Chinese in the United States would bear to the Christianization of that nation. Paul's mission (humanly speaking) would have been a failure if he had not had Roman converts direct from heathenism. Was he to have any such? The Philippian jailer gives the reply. He was as unpromising a candidate for Christianization as could have been found. He was predisposed against Christianity by his being an official, which gave him at least an external connection with the state religion; and if he was like most jailers, who have to meet every day sights that harden the sensibilities, he was not very susceptible to spiritual influences. Lydia's conversion was a pledge that at least among good Jews Paul would have some converts; the conversion of the jailer was a

promise that among Romans, even of the most inaccessible sort spiritually, there was to be a harvest of souls.

I. *The preparation for God's spiritual work.* The rebuke of the evil spirit in the girl, the anger of the crowd, the imprisonment, seemed to form a series of events complete in itself and existing for itself, if we may say so. But these things were but the preparation for something more important.

1. The preparation for God's work was by affliction. The disciples found themselves cast down, but the sequel showed it was in order that they might be exalted, by being used as a means of glorifying God. Many a sick bed offers opportunity of heavenly service far beyond the time of health that preceded it. A man's best work comes sometimes after he has ceased to be able to work at all. We may believe that the apostle John when he was striving for the success of the Word like a son of thunder, could not have been so influential for good as in the last feeble days when he could only go about murmuring "Little children, love one another." *Ecclesia pressa* is always introductory to *ecclesia triumphans*. God works through our afflictions even when we do not know it. Well may we then count it joy when we are honored by falling upon them.

2. The affliction of the apostles was certain, sooner or later, because of the ever persisting antagonism between the gospel and the world. It was only a matter of time when hostility must arise towards Christianity from the Roman Government. The Roman Emperor was not only head of the Roman religion, he was one of the Roman gods. To refuse to offer incense to the image of the emperor was therefore treason to the state. But among conquered nations the Romans wisely refrained from pressing

the point of religion. So there were certain *religiones licitæ* whose worship was permitted by Roman law. But the adherents of these religions must not try to make proselytes of Romans. The Jewish religion was thus authorized by the state. Christianity might escape persecution along two lines: first, by seeming to be more or less the same as Judaism; second, by not making Roman proselytes. The Romans failed generally to distinguish between Christianity and Judaism until about the end of the first Christian century. But the Christians got into trouble long before that by making proselytes among Romans. The trouble in which Paul and Silas found themselves was not of this sort, but it arose from the healing of the girl possessed of an evil spirit, i. e., it arose from the prosecution of gospel work. But the relation of Christianity to the Roman State was such that if Paul succeeded in his European journey he must find antagonism at every step. And is it not for ever so to the end of time? Must not the gospel always find opposition from the world? Surely this vile world is not a friend to grace to help us on to God.

3. Paul's understanding of this made him careless of being unpopular. He was certainly the kind of man who loved association with others. But when he set out to work for the gospel he never flinched for a moment because the multitude were against him. He had counted the cost of his service and was perfectly willing to pay it.

4. The affliction of the apostles was relieved by faith. They trusted God to give them strength to endure it, to lead them out of it into safety, and beyond these, to use the affliction itself as an instrument of his own purposes. What a blessing it is to God's servants everywhere to feel that their sufferings are not wasted, but that God permits

them to come to them with full cognizance, that they all have a place in his plans. and that in every one he has the intention of making out some good. Christian faith alone can turn trouble into blessing, and can put a song of rejoicing on the lips in the prison-midnight. "However sharp the anguish of the lash might have been, however ponderous the prison, however great the peril, since Paul and Silas ceased not to praise God, hence we discover how constantly they had been inspired to bear the cross." (*Calvin*). In a very real sense it is inspiration—the presence in the heart of the Holy Spirit, which gives to God's own people joy for sorrow.

5. God is with his children in their times of trial. The prisoners listened to Paul and Silas hymning the strange joy of their hearts, but there was an unmentioned and unseen auditor besides, even God himself; and if there was joy in the hearts of the apostles, it was only a reflection of the joy their Heavenly Father had in them.

6. Such faith makes one thoughtful for others. It is not so mystic (in the bad sense) that the believer forgets the things of earth. It is practical and makes the heart sensitive to others' needs. Paul was not so absorbed in his own rapture as to forget the jailer. The jailer was no friend of his, yet when he would have killed himself Paul cried with a loud voice saying, "Do thyself no harm; for we are all here." Forgetfulness of others is no part of the soul's deepest joy. If, as a great German tragedian suggested, God's joy in himself consists in the knowledge of his own infinite love, the joy of communion with God must have as one element in it the consciousness of a god-like love of our fellow-men. As you rise nearer to the life-giving sun, you can see more of the earth which it blesses with its shining.

7. In Paul's joy in God there was involved forgiveness to those who injured him. His solicitude for the jailer lest he should take his own life shows that he bore him no resentment. His peace in God gave him a magnanimity which was above grudge-bearing. The Christian life is large and high, far removed, when God's true joy is in it, from the pettinesses of life. Its eye is on the sun. It sees the earth too, but its chief thought, like the eagle's, is above.

II. *The Work of God.* God by his permission of the apostles' affliction had made ready for the first soul-gathering among the heathen of Europe.

1. The first element that appears in the experience of the Philippian jailer is fear. He was trembling when he sprang into the cell (v. 29). It was the anguish of the soul when for the first time it is truly conscious of its own guilt before God. John Bunyan had an awful experience of his own sinfulness before he was converted. Froude (in his little book on Bunyan) seems to think that Bunyan's agony was somewhat unnecessary, for all the sins we are aware of Bunyan's having committed were frivolity, Sunday-breaking, and profanity. But Bunyan was right. It is not the quantity of sin but the fact of sin *per se* that makes a man guilty before God, and there is no soul so pure that out of Christ it cannot legitimately feel something of what the convicted jailer of Philippi felt. If all have sinned, all are entitled to a guilty fearful conscience.

2. This dread of conscience was immediately accompanied by a consciousness of the supernatural. The quaking prison, the miraculously-opened doors, convinced the jailer of God. He fell at the feet of the apostles as the representatives of God (v. 29). What is

the conviction of sin but the reaction of conscience induced by the knowledge of self which results from a true soul-vision of God? If men could but know God as he is, nothing but their own resolute hardness of heart could keep them from repentance. Show me God and you have shown me what I am not.

3. With fear went desire. The jailer arose from his feet that he might bring Paul and Silas out and lay an inquiry before them: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" What it was to be saved he knew in a most undefined way. But he was conscious that he was a sinner and he wanted to get away from his sin, and whatever salvation was, he craved it. Wants do not have to be defined in order to be genuine. A child knows that it feels bad but cannot always tell where or why, yet its suffering is most real. The human heart, burdened with the consciousness of sin, knows that it is suffering, that it needs something, though it cannot say just what. It wants salvation, whatever salvation is. And to that want the gospel comes with complete satisfaction. But it does not come except to the want.

4. The jailer was willing to do anything necessary for salvation. "Sirs, what must I do?" Were there penances, he was prepared for them. Were there multitudes of prayers and sacrifices, he was ready to devote years to them. Were there dedications of property to divine service, he would not flinch from self-impoverishment. He was ready to do anything necessary. In contrast with this old legalistic way (so current still) of looking at salvation as a thing to be earned how fine is the reply of the apostles.

5. The answer has well been called classic. It sums up once for all the ages everything that is required of

man in order to be saved. So long as earth shall be earth men will be conscious of sin, and from their conscience-smitten hearts will be ever rising the anxious inquiry "What must I do to be saved?" and for ever and for ever there comes from the God of all mercy the gracious reply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Glorious answer! So simple a child might accept it, so deep a philosopher may never find all the blessed things it means. What must we do to be saved? (1) Do nothing. Salvation is not of works. The deeds of men are but a Babel tower. They do not reach the skies. (2) Believe. Faith, the emptying out of self, the recognition of the fact that man is made for dependence upon Another, the actual casting of the soul upon Him in dependence. (3) Make Christ the object of faith. Saving faith is not believing that there was such a man as Jesus Christ, that he spake truth, that he is the Saviour of the world; it is coming to Christ and saying, "I verily accept thee as my personal Saviour, I trust in thy death as atoning for the guilt of my sins, and I trust in thy everlasting life as the source of my purposes and my strength." It is personal trust in him who died and liveth again for ever for us.

6. This faith has its social bearing. It is recognized as an influential element in the family, which is here shown to be the God-constituted unit of human life. To God, men are not merely so many nations, or so many individuals, but so many families. Faith in the home touches all that are there. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house," for they also will believe.

The members of the family form a unit in the new dispensation as well as in the old. Whatever adults there

were in that Philippian home we may be sure had sympathy with the change of heart of the family's head, and the beginnings of Christian faith, for such faith warranted baptism.

7. True faith will not be ignorant. It recognizes its imperfection and is ever seeking to learn more of the truth of God, that it may appropriate it by faith. The jailer and his family were instructed in Christian truth by the apostles (v. 32). The deadness of some Christian lives arises from a failure to be ever learning more of God's truth.

8. As soon as faith had entered the jailer's heart, it emerged again in a deed of kindness: he washed the apostles' wounds. So by a beautiful spiritual chemistry faith is ever transmuting the love of God as it comes into our upward-opened hearts into love for our fellow-men. For all love is one, but it tends to manifoldness. "If we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4: 12).

9. Immediately there came an open recognition of Christian faith in the form of baptism. Baptism is not only a means of grace, it is also a testimony. It is a "seal," a sign of an act's being done. The apostolic way of being Christians is openly: no subterfuge, no concealment, no half-heartedness, no waiting to see if one will hold out. Wherever there is faith there should there be frank, manly avowal of it.

10. No wonder the jailer when he had brought them into his house rejoiced (v. 34). It was the happiest time he had ever known in his life. We know not what his past had been—it may have been criminal, it may have been only morally and religiously indifferent. At any rate it had not been what it ought to have been. God's

wrath had been abiding on it. Now there had come the release from the guilt and the power of sin, the escape from indifference, the knowledge of Christ and his righteousness, the consciousness of reconciliation with God, the promise of service, the hope of glory, all things that the human soul most desires. No wonder the jailer rejoiced. Blessed beyond words are all those who come to know Christ and his salvation.

III. *Lessons about conversion.*

1. Providence often prepares for it, sometimes by suffering and sorrow.

2. There are many ways of being led to Christ, and all are valid. Lydia came one way, the jailer another. No one need try to force himself into another's experience.

3. Faith is the same for all. All are sinners. All need the atoning blood. All must trust without any merit of their own.

4. Salvation is free to all. What Paul said to the jailer he said to the whole world. Whosoever will may come.

PAUL AT ATHENS.

ACTS 17:22-31.

MILTON characterized Athens as the "eye of Greece, mother of arts and eloquence." No man of ordinary taste and culture could stand in the midst of its glories without a feeling of æsthetic enthusiasm. Yet Paul was moved only by an intense pity and indignation. Yonder was the Parthenon, beautified by the skill of Phidias and Praxiteles. Yonder the Areopagus, crowded with its colossal image of Mars; here were the famous schools of philosophy by the Ilissus. On every hand were images of gods and heroes. Pliny says there were three thousand such effigies here. It was a proverb, "There are more gods than men in Athens." The apostle possibly walked down the Street of Hermes where a winged figure adorned the front of every home, or along the Avenue of Tripods, lined on every side with votive offerings given by grateful athletes to the gods who had helped them in the games. Gods everywhere: gods on pedestals, in niches, on the corners of the streets—gods and demigods, good, bad, and indifferent—a wilderness of gods! And the heart of the apostle was moved within him "as he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." At length he mounted one of the rostrums in the public square and began to speak. There was no difficulty in getting an audience, for Athens was a paradise of gossips and saunterers. Its shibboleth was "What's the news?" So they gathered about him, men and women, priests and philos-

ophers, all sorts and conditions of people. And he spoke to them of Jesus and the Resurrection, or as the Greeks had it, Jesus and Anastasia—a pair of new deities. He who introduced a god into Athens was counted a public benefactor. The interest of his audience was thus enchained at once. Presently they said, "Let us go to the Areopagus for a better hearing." So to Areopagus they went, and the apostle preached a famous sermon there.

THE PREACHER AND HIS PULPIT.

I. Observe the man. Renan calls him "the little ugly Jew." He was stoop-shouldered, weak-eyed, and a stammerer, but it did not take the Athenians long to discover that there was something in him, and the world, through all these centuries, has regarded him as one of its famous men. No profounder thinker or more skilful dialectician ever lived. He said of himself, "They tell me that my words are weighty, but my bodily presence is weak and my speech contemptible." The man's power lay in his conviction, and "thereby hangs a tale." In his youth, while attending the Rabbinical school, he gave promise of becoming a leader in his time. He was a pupil of Gamaliel, known as "the flower of the law." All that good blood and brilliant opportunities could do for him was done. In time he became a zealot among his people, was chosen to an honored place in the Sanhedrin, was distinctly in the line of promotion, and great things were expected of him. Then came the great sun-burst. On his way down to Damascus the Voice, which ever after he revered as his heavenly monitor, spoke to him, and life was never again the same. Thenceforth his will, heart, intellect, and conscience went out towards the things which he had previously hated. The love of Christ constrained him. So thoroughly was his moral nature revo-

lutionized that for the name of Jesus Christ, whom he had previously reviled and persecuted, he cheerfully surrendered all the bright hopes of his future, all high ambitions and aspirations—laid everything at the feet of his new Master, saying, "I no longer live, but Christ liveth in me."

II. Observe the pulpit. It was a fateful place. Many a man had here been devoted to death. On this stone platform Demosthenes had stood and uttered forth "breathing thoughts in burning words." Here Socrates had made his apology and was doomed to drink the fatal hemlock. It was an historic platform. Facing it, on a shelf of rock, stood the Temple of the Furies, and over it towered the Temple of Mars. To this place Paul brought such a message as it had never heard before. He spoke as an ambassador from the court of heaven, bringing a message of peace to troubled souls. He stood on the "Rock of Impudence," where criminals were wont to defend their lives. It was not Paul, however, but his religion, that was put on trial that day. And it has been on trial ever since. "The word of the Lord is tried." Christianity has been through the fires of persecution; it has withstood the assaults of criticism; it has been tested all along the centuries in the histories of nations and men.

■ We ourselves have put it to the test in the experience of our common life. And everywhere it has withstood the strain. The gods innumerable whom the apostle Paul confronted in Athens have all fallen to their faces on the earth, and "none so poor to do them reverence." Mars has not one worshipper, nor great Athene whose spear and shield glittered in the sun. The gods are gone, all gone. And the philosophies of Athens have gone with them. Zeno, Epicurus, Plato, are scarcely more than names. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.

III. Observe the audience. Here were priests, doubtless, with the names of their deities worn as frontlets between their eyes. Here were philosophers and students in their classic robes, representing all the various schools by the Ilissus.

(1.) Stoics. These were Pantheists, who spoke of God as "the All," "the Universal Soul," and other terms familiar to us in this day. They thought of man as an exhalation from the all-pervading Force or Soul of the Universe, whose destiny was to be absorbed presently, like a drop of water in the boundless sea.

(2.) Epicureans. These were Materialists. They said, "Death ends all." And, inasmuch as life was circumscribed by the narrow horizons of time and sense, what better could they do than make the most of the present hour? Their aphorism was, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

(3.) Academicians. These were Agnostics: they dreamed many things, but knew nothing. All their suggestions were advanced with a "perhaps" or "it may be so." And, aside from these philosophers, there were doubtless others who were eager to know about eternal things, earnest, thoughtful, with a great longing to know the truth and to follow it. There were, moreover, the curiosity-mongers and hangers-on; but all alike were immortal men and women, made in God's likeness and travelling on to his judgment-bar. Oh, Paul, preach thy best! If thou believest in the saving power of the gospel, then, in God's name, proclaim it without fear. Preach as a dying man to dying men, and God help thee!

THE SERMON AND ITS RESULT.

IV. Observe the sermon. Its exordium was exceedingly felicitous. Taking for his theme the inscription

upon an altar which he had observed in the market-place, "To the Unknown God," and mindful of the multitudinous shrines, statues, and other tokens of a religious spirit, the apostle began by saying, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are exceedingly devout." It was a clever compliment at the outset and gained him their good-will. He announces his proposition thus: "God, the unseen, unknown God, him declare I unto you." He then proceeds to show how God, so far from being really unknown, has unveiled himself in many ways. We see him in creation: "He made the world and all things that are therein." We mark his providence: "In him we live and move and have our being." The preacher fortifies himself at this point by a quotation from one of their own poets, Aratus, to wit, "We are also his offspring." We note his goodness also preëminently in his grace. He has made himself known in Jesus Christ, and in him has brought life and immortality to light.

V. Observe the result. Paul's sermon was never finished. The assembly on Mars' Hill was abruptly broken up. But no truth is ever spoken in vain. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

(1.) It is written that "some mocked." It was easy for these philosophers to make sport of the stammering little Jew. It was quite in their line to point their finger at his grotesque doctrine of the crucified God. The resurrection and the judgment were preposterous to them. The generation of mockers has not passed away.

(2.) Others said, "We will hear thee again." But they never did hear him again. No doubt as they sauntered down from Areopagus, like modern congregations, they dissected the preacher. "That was a clever opening," said one, "wherein he complimented our piety." "Very true," said another, "and I like his fervor. How he warmed to his theme when he spoke of the judgment!" A third said, "He is a master of logic. Did you mark his double syllogism, 'We are God's offspring, but we are living souls; living souls cannot be born of dead matter: ergo God is not a graven image'? Verily, the man is a dialectician." "Yes, and a master of literature as well. What could have been more appropriate than his quotation from Aratus?" Thus they all agreed that Paul was a man of no common power and quite worthy of another audience. "We will hear him again," they said; but the time never came. Once and again, Paul sailed by the port of Athens, but that sermon was never resumed, and the men of Athens never looked into his face again. Oh why do people procrastinate? Why do they wait the more convenient season, when the only convenient season is now? Procrastination is in the nature of suicide. Men do not mean to die; they simply put off beginning to live.

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
Creeps in this petty space from day to day
Till the last syllable of recorded time:
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death."

There is a Russian legend of a man who intended to build a splendid home. The materials were brought and all things ready, but he put off from time to time the laying of the corner-stone, until at length death saved him the trouble, as the legend puts it:

"And thus in silent waiting stood
The piles of stones and piles of wood,
Till Death, who in his vast affairs
Ne'er puts off things as men do theirs,
"Winked at our hero as he passed.
'Your house is finished, sir, at last—
A narrow house, a house of clay,
Your mansion for an endless day.'"

(3.) "Howbeit certain ones believed." Among these were Dionysius, who is said to have been afterwards a bishop of Athens, and Damaris, a woman. They listened to Paul's announcement of life and immortality in Jesus Christ. They said, "This is true, and it is for me." We are wont to plead earnestly in behalf of our ministers that they may have the gift of tongues. Might it not be well to pray for a while that the people may have the gift of ears? There are some creatures among the lower orders in nature whose auricular organs are so constructed that they can only hear the smaller sounds. They can detect the whisper of zephyrs, the murmur of brooks, the hum of insects; but the roar of the earthquake or the crash of heaven's artillery is nothing to them. In like manner there are some of us who attend only to the smaller sounds that are heard on the sensual levels of life, the call to wealth, to pleasure, to perishable honors, and cannot hear the voice of heaven inviting us to duty, to right living, to life and immortality. Oh for the hearing ear and the understanding heart!

God speaks to every one of us. He calls us to pardon of sin and to peace that passeth understanding. There is life in his word if we will heed it. But if we go our way, like the man who seeth his face in a glass and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was, it were a thousand-fold better had we never heard it.

PAUL AT CORINTH.

ACTS 18:1-11.

IT is nearly impossible to give a theme to this passage. "Paul at Corinth" evades it; and the evasion is wise, because the lesson, short as it is, sums up pretty nearly all of Paul's various experiences in preaching the gospel. It is a fair epitome of his whole life. A reasonable theme for the lesson would therefore be, "Paul's Experiences as a Preacher of the Gospel Epitomized at Corinth." To give a shorter title would be to neglect some precious part.

I. We see first something of the way in which Paul moved about as an agent of the gospel.

1. Failure was the cause generally of his changing his place of work. At some places (Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus) he stayed a considerable time. It was because his attempt to lead men to Christ there passed from the point of endeavor to the point of success. At other places (and how many could be named) he preached until he was stoned out of the gates, or (what doubtless was quite as bad to him) met with such complete unsusceptibility of heart that not even antagonism was aroused. Paul had not been maltreated at Athens, but he had made little or no impression. One might have hoped that Athens, which had prided itself through centuries upon being open to receive all truth, would have listened to the gospel with something better than a cynical smile. But worldly wisdom failed to recognize the wisdom of God. The wise in their own eyes were shown to be foolish in the eyes of heaven. It is easier to be learned than it is to be humble.

2. That a place seemed unpromising for gospel work did not deter Paul from entering it. Athens might have been considered a favorable spot for the attempt and Corinth not. But Paul went as readily to Corinth as to Athens. Corinth was a place of importance in two directions: commercial and political. It was a great port and full of rich men, who gave it the tone of luxury. It was also the seat of the proconsul of Achaia (the Roman governor of Southern Greece). From the luxurious fashionable set who gave Corinthian society its character Paul could hope for little, nor could he expect any heed from the representatives of the Roman State, who would sneer at anything religious, particularly if it came from among the Jews. Nor could Paul expect much from the body of the people, whose character was pretty much determined by that of the leading classes. Yet what a mistake he would have made if he had not gone to Corinth. He was to win many souls there for Christ, was to establish one of the best-known churches in Christendom there, and was to spend a considerable part of his missionary life there. If Paul had not gone to Corinth he would have lost one of the seals of his ministry (1 Cor. 9: 2), one of his most important letters of commendation written with the Spirit of God (2 Cor. 3: 2, 3), a considerable part of his reasons for glorying (2 Cor. 7: 4). The badness of a place is not a good ground for keeping the gospel from it, but the contrary. "Nineveh, Sodom, Corinth—no city is so corrupt that He does not send preachers of righteousness to the people" (Starke in Lechler).

II. Paul had a definite way of determining who his associates were to be in any place. There is nothing mysterious in his method, nor is it different from that followed by every other man. Each man by the laws of

personal affinity goes to "his own." Paul naturally gravitated towards men of similar mind with himself.

1. He naturally sought out Jews. He was a Jew himself and had the intense race-feeling which has always distinguished "the peculiar people." (2 Cor. 11:22). They were in a sense half way to the gospel already, inasmuch as they believed in the true God and his ancient revelation; therefore they offered ground already prepared for the sowing of the Word of life. Thus it was that on coming to Corinth Paul made the acquaintance of Aquila. He knew that in him he would have much in common. Ways of living and thinking would be considerably the same. Paul loved companionship, and here alone in a strange city sought it along the line already prepared.

2. The development of this friendship was assisted by the similarity of occupation of the two men. Both were tent-makers, a trade common in Cilicia, the apostle's native land. Sameness of occupation is a very active element in the making and establishing of friendships. We do not look out over the world and say, "Where are those whose friendship would be most congenial and best for me in every way?" We go about our daily tasks, and among those we constantly and, as we may say, mechanically and involuntarily meet, are generally found those who make our friends. We may accept this as a law of life. Environment is largely given to us. And yet not so that we cannot have any choice concerning it. Some occupations will certainly lead us among worse men than others. To make money is not the only thing to be considered as we choose our life work and our life associates.

3. Still another element was at work in the shaping

of Paul's relations with others—Providence. By chance, some might say, Paul and Aquila, after many vicissitudes for both, met in Corinth. Compared with the average man's life, how strange had Paul's career been hitherto. And Aquila had had his ups and downs. He had been born in Pontus, thence had gone to Rome, had been driven out by the decree of Claudius against the Jews, and was now in Corinth. Paul driven from Athens, Aquila driven from Rome, met at Corinth, the midway centre of Roman commercial life. We may bless God that his providence is at work in our lives, and especially in our friendships. What mistakes we should make, what misery we should unwittingly choose for ourselves, if we were left alone. "That happy calamity of Aquila, then, admonishes us that the Lord often counsels better for us when he afflicts us very grievously, than if he should treat us with the greatest indulgence, and when he drives us about through a sad exile, that he may conduct us into heavenly quietude" (Calvin).

III. Paul's way of life is set before us.

1. He pursued his trade. His having a trade was due to the general habit among the Jews. "It was a proverb among them that the father who neglected to bring up his son to a trade taught him to be a thief" (Hackett). "What is commanded of a father towards his son?" says a writer in the Talmud. "To circumcise him, to teach him the law, to teach him a trade." The question of a minister's pursuing a trade to-day is, as it was in Paul's day, a matter of judgment. It is to be decided by such questions as (a) its necessity and (b) its possibility. Paul had a good reason for desiring to pay his own way. There were some who insinuated that he was an apostle for the money there was in it. (1 Cor. 9: 12, 15.)

2. While Paul plied his trade among his fellow Jews he was discussing religious questions with them and laying a foundation for the gospel. Doubtless he had many an interesting conversation while at work and while resting when the day's work was over. Of these we have no record. What is recorded is that on the Sabbath day he went with his friends to the synagogue and there took the opportunity, which was open to all, of discussing religious matters. Paul shows us what we have seen in many another life, that he who works not most hastily, but most discreetly, works best. Many an enthusiast would have accused Paul of wasting time at the beginning of his Corinthian life. And yet Paul felt the burden of perishing souls as few others have felt it, and he knew, as few others have known, how best to commend the gospel of Christ.

IV. Paul's increase of activity. If he had continued his Corinthian work at the pace at which he began it, then indeed he must have made a mistake. It is not a mistake to make a discreet beginning, but it is a mistake to end there. The time came when the ground was prepared for the proclamation of the full gospel to the Corinthian Jews. When that time came delay would have been not discretion but cowardice.

1. The change in Paul's procedure seems to have been due to the coming of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia (v. 5). He was troubled about the condition of the church he had left in Thessalonica, and his companions relieved his mind on that point (1 Thes. 3:6). But more important than this, he felt weak and depressed while at Corinth (1 Cor. 2:3). This may have been partly due to physical reasons, such as made his Galatian ministry trying (Gal. 4:13, 14). At any rate the sympathy and

help (2 Cor. 1 : 19) of Silas and Timothy must have meant much to him. He was a man, like other men, susceptible to influence. And with his friends he decided that the time for bringing out the full gospel had come, the time when Corinth (like Athens) must decide whether it would entertain or drive out the truth of God.

2. The result was that which was common with Paul in similar circumstances—opposition. The opposition rose to the point of intense ridicule, literally blasphemy, of the apostle's words. And what was it all about? The simple declaration that Jesus was the Christ (v. 5). With us opposition to the gospel is not generally open and scoffing as at Corinth; it is rather in the heart. But it is genuine, mighty, and persistent. The natural man receiveth not the things of God. We must expect then that men will always antagonize their own coming to Christ. Opposition is the normal attitude of man's unregenerate heart towards divine truth.

V. Paul changed his plan at this point. He had worked hitherto along the line of friendship. He had conciliated. Now he rises with the moral dignity of a messenger of God, and shaking out his garment that not a grain of dust from the place may cleave to him, he cries, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (v. 6).

1. This invoking of the testimony of the dust was a common Oriental method of cursing one's enemies, and was full of terror to those who witnessed it. The purpose of Paul in resorting to it was not however that anger which usually occasioned it, nor did he use it, we may feel sure, as a curse. But here, as at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:51), it was done to impress those with whom Paul had labored in vain with a sense of their own aban-

doned condition before God. It was to press home upon their hearts, by something which meant more to them than any words could mean, the thought that they were lost men, in order that they might be led to repentance and so not be lost. It was not an invocation of wrath upon them, but rather a warning to flee from wrath.

2. Paul next tried what generally speaking would have been called the more unfavorable ground, since he had had no success where he had been entitled to expect it. In the same way in which he had been driven from Athens to less favorable Corinth he was driven from Jewish Corinth to the less favorable Gentile Corinth. Paul, we may say, pressed his way forward along the line of least resistance. If he found Christians he went to them; if not, to Jews; if he found the Jews did not receive him, he turned to the devout Gentiles, to which class belonged Titus Justus.

VI. The results at last appear. If there had been no results, Paul in a sense would have accomplished his mission. Yet what every preacher is after is conversions, and if these do not follow he cannot but feel that his work is pretty much a failure. And he is right in this. For the Word of God is meant to save men, and God intends to give it his blessing. What then if conversions do not follow preaching? What did Paul do? He went to another place.

1. The results were great. He preached in a Gentile house (i. e., that of Titus Justus; Paul still lived with Aquila), and the ruler of the synagogue was converted. Was it that last warning of the shaking off the dust that led to this? Somehow the most extreme conquest which Paul could have asked was won. The chief of the party that had rejected him had succumbed. His household

(as in the case of the jailer at Philippi) came with him, "and many of the Corinthians hearing believed" (v. 8). Athens, which might have been expected to give much to Christ, gave nothing. Dissolute Corinth, which might have been expected to give nothing to Christ, gave much. So does the gospel find a welcome in the unlikeliest hearts and the grace of God find a home in the darkest spots. You never can tell where the gospel will win its way. It is ours to press onward in every direction.

2. After Paul's discouragement there came this astounding success. After ten years of seemingly unfruitful labor in China, there came the beginnings of what is now the largest Christian church in that empire. So God reminds us that it is all his work, and that where we have failed he can yet do marvels; and so he sends us the sunlight of success after the long darkness of waiting. Unless we are better than Paul we may expect times of discouragement; and, bless God, we may also expect times of deep rejoicing.

VII. The divine encouragement is given to Paul in a vision (vv. 9, 10). The extraordinary means taken to reassure him may probably be viewed as an indication that he needed reassuring very much. Perhaps his physical weakness still depressed him. At any rate he needed encouragement, and needed it very much. It was given to him:

1. By the presence of God. Paul had his companions now with him. But he was lonesome for a stronger than they, and God came himself. Even the strongest souls have such hours of longing after God. Luther once said, "Many persons, to whom I often seem to be cheerful in my outward appearance, suppose that I am always walking on roses; but God knows what my true condition is."

But is not God everywhere always? Yes, but he manifests himself at some times more than at others, and then especially we call him present. We long to have God with us, but beyond that, to know that he is with us. And in many ways God lets us know, and in the knowledge gives us deep comfort.

2. The Lord encouraged Paul with a double promise : (a), that no one should harm him, although danger would menace him as he boldly preached the truth ; (b), that he should have many converts for Christ, for this seems to be implied in the expression, "for I have much people in this city" (v. 10). So Paul was reminded anew and doubly that his work was more God's than his own. Like Christ's, his life was perfectly safe until "his hour" had come. Before that, shipwreck and stoning, disease and the lions were alike powerless. And before Paul had set foot in Corinth the Lord had been there and set his seal upon his own. Here again we meet the problem of the divine and human at work together—of foreordination and human freedom, both true, and yet irreconcilable perfectly to our present comprehension. But to the apostle of the cross there is great comfort as he leads God's own to come out and confess God, in knowing that God has been there before him and marked them for himself. (2 Tim. 2 : 19.)

VIII. General lessons.

1. The gospel has an irregular movement : all is not success, all is not failure.

2. Our duty is to press on without ceasing.

3. God is with us. The powers that resist the gospel are nothing to the power that befriends it.

4. Success is sure ; in multitudes of places it has proved immediate.

PAUL AT EPHESUS.

ACTS 19: 1-12.

THE picture of Paul at Ephesus, like that of Paul on the Areopagus, appeals powerfully to the imagination. Paul at Athens stands for Christianity flinging down its challenge to the world-philosophies; Paul at Ephesus, the rich port of the Orient, the seat of the splendid worship of Diana, the most dissolute spot on the globe, stands for Christianity summoning iniquitous heathenism to wash and be clean.

This marvellous spectacle is not more interesting however as a whole than in its details. The idea of Paul's being at Ephesus at all provokes immediate attention, but not more than the special things which happened to him there.

Among these is his meeting with the twelve disciples of John the Baptist. This last mention in the New Testament of the great forerunner of the Messiah sets before us the strangest, most romantic, most pathetic figure of the New Testament years. The life of John the Baptist to an earthly judgment seems a most pitiful failure. After long years of preparatory meditation in the desert he enters upon an altogether worthy humanitarian mission, to succeed after a fashion for a brief time, then to fall into the hands of an unscrupulous king and to have life go out like a snuffed candle; and beside this, how pitiful that even success meant not success for self, but the exaltation of another. There is nothing more sublimely touching in history than the complete self-effacement of John the Baptist, who truly said of himself that he was but a voice in

the wilderness—a voice that gives a message but tells nothing of him who delivers it: the message everything, the man nothing.

But such a judgment of John the Baptist contains much error. We think of his work as being effaced. Yet here are twelve men, a quarter of a century after they have heard him, holding fast to the truths he taught. Who can tell how many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other lives there were, of whom we have never heard, who received at the hands of the Baptist for all eternity the impress of divine truth? Call no man's life unsuccessful because its results are not visible or measurable to us. Moreover, John the Baptist had the honor of being the greatest of forerunners. We do not think of Elijah as deserving pity. He was a great man, far more apt to be envied than pitied. Yet John the Baptist was greater than he. To him was given the unique privilege of being the herald of the Son of God. What could man ask more than to tell of the coming of the King? But this after all is only relative work. John the Baptist did nothing that stands for himself. All his work was but a pedestal for some one else to stand upon. So says some o'er-sympathetic heart. Yes, but the work of all men at last is only relative. No man liveth to himself. No man is self-made or self-ending. We are all but finger-posts. Most blessed among men then was he who pointed most plainly and immediately to the Saviour of the world. John the Baptist deserves not our pity but our congratulation.

Such thoughts concerning the forerunner are suggested to us by the appearance before Paul at Ephesus of twelve men who had accepted John's message and had cherished it for thirty years. Now let us study the lessons of their appearance.

I. We see in their case *the reality of an imperfect Christianity*. There are certain simple things which, once truly possessed, make one a Christian. The line between death and salvation has been passed. Much advance is still possible, but it does not make the fact of one's being a Christian one whit more real. The feeblest, weakest Christian is just as truly saved as the strongest and most advanced in the things of God.

1. The truth of this statement is plain in the case of these twelve disciples of John the Baptist. Just what they knew and just what they did not know has been much disputed by commentators, and to little use, as the Bible record is so slight. "Those twelve men who come forward so abruptly in our history disappear as suddenly, leaving us in doubt whence they came, where they had been, and in some respects what particular phase of religious belief they represented. The episode is one of strange interest from the very fact of its suggesting so many questions, the solution of which our imperfect knowledge of the first Christian age has put beyond our reach." (Hackett.) What was the extent of the Christianity of these men? (a) They had repented of sin and put their faith in a coming (and as yet unknown) Saviour, and had confessed this faith in baptism (vv. 3, 4). (b) They had known as much of the Holy Spirit as was common among the Jews and as was known to John, but they had not the specially definite knowledge of him given after the ascension of Christ, and particularly that manifestation of the Spirit which came through miracles. Nevertheless they were true Christians, for Luke calls them "disciples" (v. 1), which he would not have done in the quiet time when he wrote this record of the Acts without full cognizance of its meaning.

2. The general inference follows for ourselves that one may be a real Christian though a very imperfect one. If a wide knowledge of divine truth in its extension and a deep experimental knowledge of its separate elements were required at the entrance, who could be saved? What would become of all the little children who know Christ and accept and love him in a child's way and witness in their lives that they are Christ's? Who indeed among the old and maturely experienced Christians could assert himself equal to such tests? Bless God, the way into eternal life is so simple that a simple-minded man, a child, a stupid Hottentot, can find it even in the twilight of the mind. How gracious is the Lord in accepting us when there is so little in us that would seem to warrant him in calling us his. And yet that little is everything. Faith may be smaller than a mustard-seed to the eye, yet if it be genuine it has in it a mountain-moving potency. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Christ never asked any man how much he knew or how deeply he felt or how good he was. "Repent and believe" was his one message to the whole world.

3. Yet one thing must be said: that a genuine faith is one which utilizes what knowledge it has. The message of John the Baptist was very fragmentary compared to the full revelation of God's truth given by Christ, yet it had in it the power of salvation. Even this imperfect truth was stored with the possibility of eternal life—but only by being truly accepted and utilized. The measure of our learning unto eternal life is not how much truth we have heard (as by preaching and teaching and reading), but how much we have incorporated into our own being. A very little food will save a human life, but not until it is assimilated.

II. The story of the twelve Johannean disciples shows us *the necessity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life*. The reply of the men to Paul's question looks as though they had never known that there was such an existence as the Holy Spirit. But this is incredible in men who were probably Jews and certainly disciples of John—who knew of the Holy Spirit. Their reply must be understood in the light of Paul's question (v. 2). And that question must be understood by the sequel when the Holy Spirit was given (v. 6). The Holy Spirit was given to them in miraculous form (it led them to speak "with tongues" and to prophesy), and this was the form of manifestation Paul was inquiring about and they were answering about. They meant therefore that they knew nothing of a Holy Spirit miraculously manifested; they did not intend to say they knew nothing at all of the existence of the Holy Spirit.

1. It was necessary that they should receive the Holy Spirit. The form in which they received Him was conditioned by the circumstances of the time. It was an age of beginnings. It was an age when miracles were rightly understood (as they would not be in this Huxleyan age) and had their proper evidential weight. Moreover, Christ had left the earth to take his throne in glory, and miracles were particularly calculated to allay the doubt of Christ's continued existence and power which must arise in the first years of his bodily absence. Powerful signs were an evidence of Christ's enthronement. It was necessary therefore that, in addition to that enlightenment of the Holy Spirit which is given to all at the beginning of the Christian life, and which continues to be given as the Christian life develops, there should be given to believers at that time this special endowment of the Spirit for tem-

porary purposes which came by the laying on of apostolic hands.

2. The same necessity for the Spirit's presence holds with us. The form of the Spirit's manifestation has doubtless changed. Miracles have ceased because the conditions which evoked them from God have long vanished, never to reappear. But the immediate dependence of the human soul upon supernatural enlightenment, guidance, and power is for ever necessary. The place of the Holy Spirit in the scheme of salvation is unchangeable. God the Father, out of love for men, devised a way to save them from their sins. God the Son came to earth and accomplished that plan, working out salvation on the cross. God the Holy Spirit prepares our hearts to receive that salvation and applies it to them. If a man could save himself he would not need supernatural help, he would not need the Holy Spirit. But a man's thinking does not save him; his working himself up to a height of poignant feeling does not save him; his making resolutions to lead a better life (or even his accomplishment of them) does not save him. Salvation is in a change of heart, in being made a new creature before God. This is a superhuman work. It is the office of the Holy Spirit, who accomplishes it in us by leading us into a saving faith in Christ.

3. Always ought we therefore to be praying for the presence of the Holy Spirit. He makes ours all that Christ has secured for us at such infinite cost; and without him we are nothing and can do nothing. Among the things Christians ask for every day there ought always to be named the blessing of the Spirit.

III. Although a very small faith has in it the power of salvation, yet there remains *the duty of full belief*.

These twelve men heard of that which supplemented John's message, of the coming of the Messiah whom John foretold. They accepted Christ. They were baptized. This re-baptism has puzzled everybody, and it is not to be fully explained. Certainly all of John's followers were not baptized over again when they followed Jesus. From this passage we learn that some of them were. When they were re-baptized and when not was probably left to the discretion of the apostles. It is impossible therefore for us to draw any inference from this passage or construct any rule upon it. The point to be noticed is, that when these men found the opportunity of making their imperfect faith more complete they at once took advantage of it.

1. Opportunity is of God. God gave them the chance to hear John the Baptist. They believed the message they heard as far as it went. God by his providence had withheld from them full Christian knowledge. Then after a time he gave them another opportunity, which they also embraced. It is a helpful thought that God's providence is similarly directing us in our Christian opportunities. There are some far away from church privileges, away from libraries, away from the possibility of reading Christian newspapers. Providence has cut off opportunity of growth by these external helps. Let such souls take courage. God has not forgotten them; he is leading them in his own way. And what shall those of us say who are in possession of all those helps to Christian knowledge and life which only a highly organized Christian civilization can offer? Surely we should thank God for our rich opportunities.

2. These men showed by their conduct that they had a desire for a more perfect faith. They had used what

opportunity they had and were longing for more. The reason of Christian lethargy is never lack of opportunity, but failure to use what opportunities one has, which implies absence of the longing for growth. The smallness of Christian knowledge is not against it, but deadness is, even if it be very large. A little thing which is increasing will soon eclipse a big thing which is defunct. If a Christian is hungry let him take hope. Those that hunger shall be filled. Despise not the day of small things, but despise the day of dead things.

3. When these twelve men had a chance to have a new accretion of Christian faith they accepted it instantly (v. 5). There was promptitude in their belief because desire had gone before it. When the new knowledge came they did not have to debate whether they wanted it or not. The antecedent processes of their hungry souls had been such that they flew to it like iron to the magnet. Oh that we might be more anxious in our own hearts for a deeper experience of the grace of God, so that when God offers it to us we should not feel surprised at its form or hesitate about accepting it or repine at it! Blessed are those who thirst after God and who let God come to them without surprise.

IV. *The seal of success* was given to Paul's labor in Ephesus (vv. 8-12). The blessing of heaven was upon his endeavors (vv. 11, 12) in such a form that no one could mistake it.

1. The form was unusual, for special reasons which have already been named. Miracles were wrought because at that time miracles needed to be wrought. What lay back of the miracles, however, was the sanction and empowerment of God. And these we need to-day upon whatever of good we attempt. We cannot see any good

results from teaching divine truth unless God blesses it, or from trying to comfort the troubled unless God's Spirit accompanies our words. All spiritual success requires God with us.

2. Extensive success was part of the corroboration of Paul's work being God's work. "All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (v. 10). We are not judges of times and seasons. A man may preach long and teach long without signs of result, and yet be doing God's work. But such a state of things is abnormal. The rule is that the word shall not return void. It is meant to save; God promises his blessing; therefore ordinarily, if all be true in the conditions, it must save. One may well look into the genuineness of a conversionless Christian work.

3. Intensive success was an additional proof of the divineness of Paul's work. There was a high degree of faith in those who believed (v. 12). Christian success has two dimensions: we ask of it, "How many believe?" and also, "How much do they believe?" What great honor was put upon Paul's labor, in that the blessing of God was given in such a way that many believed much! A few believing much or many believing little would have been far less of success. Is not God willing to give us such success to-day? Why should we always be defending the genuineness of small Christian success and looking up those things which are meant to comfort in times of discouragement, when God wants to give a great and continuous blessing?

PAUL AT MILETUS.

ACTS 20:22-35.

IN some of his remarkable experiences Paul seems far removed from us. We read but we do not comprehend, for there are no analogies in our own life. But when we come to his farewell at Miletus to the Ephesian elders, when we read his affectionate words, when we see the tears of those strong men as they brought their dear friend to the ship that was to bear him away from their sight for the last time, our own hearts are moved and we understand. We too have loved and have said farewell. Yes, we know. Paul is one of us. This touch of nature makes us kin.

The part of his pointed, plain, and yet tenderly kind address set before us for our study suggests two lines of thought: the duties of Christian service, and the blessings of Christian service.

I. *The duties of Christian service.* Paul's address is primarily applicable to officers in the Christian church, since it was addressed to elders, and from it many an installation sermon and ministerial charge has been preached to those who were set to be shepherds of the Lord's flock. And yet most of the matters treated of concern quite as much all who are trying to do any work for the Lord; and as all Christians ought to have some such work, inasmuch as they are called unto service, the passage has an application to every Christian life.

1. The first duty which, as our passage suggests, is expected of a servant of Christ, is *to endure hardness.*

Wherever Paul went the Holy Ghost testified to him through some of his fellow-Christians that he was to find bonds and afflictions (v. 23). See 13:2; 21:4, 10, 11. He expected these things as a necessary part of his service for Christ. He was not surprised at them therefore, but had so counted on them and come to understand them that they even ministered to his joy (Phil. 1:18). Now as well as then to serve Christ consistently and earnestly invokes opposition and trial. The thorn-road and none other is the way we must go. Courage is one of the most essential Christian virtues.

2. It is a Christian's duty *to live faithfully in the present* (v. 22). Paul knew not what was in store for him, beyond the general fact that it was trial. But his ignorance of the future did not trouble him. He had been through a stormy past and had found God in it, and he knew he would find him in the future. Therefore he had no need to worry, but only to turn his thought towards that which was his to deal with, the one day of the present. It would be a wise habit for us Christians if we could remember to say to ourselves every morning, "This day I must live as though it were to be my last." It is well for us to have a wide outlook over life, "to see life clearly and see it whole;" but the wide view must not displace the narrow view of the one present day, as important as any day ever to be lived by us, which is now ours to use for God.

3. It is our duty *to accomplish our appointed work* (24). The important matter to Paul was not whether he had "a good time," whether he suffered or not, but whether he did the Lord's work set for him to do. Do we ever say to ourselves, "God has a definite limited work for me to do; have I found it, and am I doing it?"

How often do we earnestly ask, expecting a definite answer, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Are we conscious of having a work for the Lord in hand? Paul's work was "to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Is that not the sum and substance of the life-work of every true Christian? What is Christian experience but an increasingly deeper appropriation of the truth of God in Christ? And what is Christian activity but an increasing manifestation in conduct of the fact that we have so received Christ? To get and to give are the parallel functions of Christian living; and if the second be lacking, life is only half life. And we must not put God off by contenting ourselves with the silent testimony of good Christian lives. This is much as an offering to Christ. But he expects also the testimony of the lips, and this especially Paul had in mind when he spoke of his ministry. When last did we testify openly for Christ? How frequently have we done so? How large a part does such testifying occupy in our definite plan of life, if we have such a plan?

4. In testifying or teaching it is our duty *to declare the whole counsel of God* (v. 27). This is something one may hesitate to do, but Paul did not shrink from it. He let God decide what truth is, and on his part accepted it, all of it, and proclaimed it, all of it. What Paul has in mind here is the will of God as expressed in the gospel plan of salvation. All truth for us converges in this. Christ and him crucified was all Paul wanted to know. But what is there in this which one should hesitate to proclaim? There are many things connected with it which are not proclaimed as they ought to be. Such are the infinite holiness of God, his unchanging justice, his hatred of sin, his edict that "the soul that sinneth it shall

die," his requirement of perfect holiness in the soul of man, his declaration that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," his provision in the death of his Son for the abolition of the guilt of sin, his settlement upon faith in Christ as the indispensable way of reconciliation with him, his requirement that those who accept Christ should serve him. The gospel is a stumbling-block and foolishness to-day as much as ever. As Paul, nevertheless, did not hesitate to proclaim it everywhere, neither should we—the gospel as it is, the power of God unto salvation.

5. It is our duty *to feed the flock* (v. 28). This is especially applicable to all who are "bishops" or overseers (as the elders of the Ephesian church were), but is there not a sense in which it is applicable to all Christians? If God gives us anything that is good, shall we keep it to ourselves? Especially if he gives us the bread of life, shall we not share it with those who are hungry for it? How much Christian experience is wasted, that is, how much knowledge of his grace God is giving us all the time, in our trials and joys, in our study and in our business, which we do not impart to any one else, but keep wholly to ourselves. How much the flock of Christ would be blessed if every sorrowing Christian who looks to God for comfort found out some other grief-stricken heart and offered comfort to it. What we have let us give.

6. We are *to watch against the enemy* (vv. 29-31). The destroyer of souls never demits his office. He goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. But he comes also in the guise of an angel of light. He appears as a teacher of truth that he may lead men astray. Paul is not referring here to those Jews and heathen who

antagonized the gospel wherever it went. He refers to evil men who hypocritically came into the church (v. 29) with the deliberate purpose of doing harm, and to others within the church who were led to backslide and to try to influence others in the same direction (v. 30). Examples of such were Hymenæus and Philetus, who taught that the resurrection is past already and overthrew the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17); and the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:2, 6), who, holding that the body is nothing, taught that the indulgence of bodily lusts could not be evil, and so led many into sin. Any man who knows more about truth than the Bible, or can show a better way than the way of Christ, or tries to weaken the uprightness of his fellows, had better be watched and guarded against.

7. A Christian ought *to be unselfish* (vv. 33-35). Paul did not covet the possessions of the Ephesians; as a proof of it he reminded them that he had earned his own living while among them. He was not living to get. His getting, what little there was of it, was only that he might live, and his living was for an end still beyond, namely, the accomplishing of the work appointed by God for him to do. Possessions were nothing, life itself was nothing, compared with the leading of souls to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. No man ever forsook more of the good things the world can give in order that he might serve Christ than Paul. It was not likely that he would go back to something less than that which he had already given up. Would that we all might truly feel that the work of Christ is the one thing of importance to us, to which everything else must yield.

8. It is our duty *to help the weak* (v. 35). It is possible that Paul means that the Ephesian elders ought to

imitate him in living by a trade and not by the gifts of the congregation, so that any man who might have been weak enough to object to the latter course would not be offended but helped by them. As this is rather far-fetched, it is better (with Hackett) to understand Paul as meaning that out of the fruit of our labors we ought to give to those who are unfortunate enough not to be able to work for themselves. Here then Christian charity, in the sense of giving, is taught. We are reminded of how Christ said that in comforting those who were sick, in clothing the needy, in visiting those in prison, we were doing these services to him. He has gone out of our sight, but he has left suffering mankind as his visible representative for us to help.

9. In all our doing we should *remember the words and example of our Lord* (v. 35). He is our pattern. Our constant question should be: "Would this, which I purpose doing, have fitted on consistently to the life of Jesus Christ?" It is no doubt true that Christians try to copy Christ in a general way. But our likeness to the pattern would be greatly increased if our endeavor were more conscious in details. Striving after a general likeness we sometimes miss it in particulars, whereas if we strove after it in particulars we could not fail to secure it as a whole.

II. We turn now to *the blessings of Christian service*. Duty is not for blessing's sake, it is for its own sake. But according to a beneficent arrangement of God, it is never without its blessing.

1. It is a blessing *to suffer for Christ* (v. 23). It is not blessed in itself to suffer. Pain is painful everywhere and always. But "for Christ" transforms pain into joy. This is Christianity's triumph. The stoic can suffer

bravely enough. He can "grin and bear it." But this is far from being able to say as Paul said, "I joy in tribulations." No wonder that with such transforming power Christianity was able to conquer the Roman Empire, fortified with the lions, the stake, and the rack! "I bless God for this day," was doubtless said by many a martyr as well as Justin. Life brings its agonies to God's people as well as to others; but they have the joy, which no others have, of being able to say truthfully to themselves, "I know that all things work together for good."

2. *The love of Christian fellowship* (vv. 25, 31). We can almost imagine we hear Paul's voice trembling with emotion, as we can see the tears springing to his eyes, while he tells these Ephesian friends how he has tried to serve them. There are many pleasant relations possible in this life, through God's kindness to us, but none is more lofty, more wholly worthy, than that of friendship in Jesus Christ. Other friendships are sweet while they last, but these alone are eternal, these alone are without the shadow of an approaching end. There are those who will make no intimate friends because then there will be no breaking of the heart-strings at last; and so life is denuded of what is best in it. The Christian need have no such fear, need lead no such decapitated life. "Make all the friends you can," says Christ, "for you and yours will be kept one in me eternally."

3. *A good conscience* (v. 26). There is no peace of mind to him who, when he thinks at all, must remember duties unaccomplished. How can there be any reasonable contentment in a life misspent? God has made us so purposely that we shall be unhappy until we try to make life worth living by serving him in Christ.

4. *Helping others spiritually* (v. 28). If one has money it is pleasant to use it in relieving others' sufferings. If he has ability of mind, it is a joy to help others in the difficulties of their thinking. But better than these is it to know Jesus Christ and lead others to accept him as their Saviour. And within the Christian fold there is offered to us the rare privilege of seeking to help one another into a deeper Christian knowledge and experience and a wider Christian usefulness. "Bear ye one another's burdens" is not a law, it is a permission of pleasure.

5. It is a blessing *to know that we are carrying on the worthy work of the past* (v. 31). Paul had labored among the Ephesians. He had done a good work. These elders were to have the privilege of carrying it on after he was gone. It is a thrilling thought that in laboring for Christ we are not standing alone in toil, but are perpetuating what is best in the past, are taking our share in doing the world's work, are performing the right function of the living who stand between the past and the future, and are filling our place in the great achievement of history, the development of the kingdom of Christ.

6. *We are specially under God's care* (v. 32). Paul commended his dear friends at Ephesus to God, and he knew God would take care of them. Surely they were comforted by this when the perplexing hours came when they missed Paul most. They knew a better friend even than Paul was with them. Apostles, pastors, teachers, parents, friends go "the way of all the earth." We miss their strength and sympathy and wisdom in counsel. But God, to whom they prayerfully commended us and the church they loved, has not forgotten the trust. He is with us, his strength and sympathy shall not fail us.

7. One blessing of the Christian life is *to be built up*

in all that is good (v. 32). God is able to do this, and we believe, nay, we know, he does it. We feel as Augustine felt, that poor as his life was, whatever good there was in it was due to the grace of God. Somewhat we know God has done for us, in faith, in knowledge, in Christian character. But how much more he would build us up if we would but let him.

8. We have *an inheritance among all them that are sanctified* (v. 32). This may refer to the reward of heaven. But it is likely that it refers to the reward of earth also (similarly Acts 26: 18; Eph. 1: 18). In both respects we have a blessed estate. As to the future, we know that eye hath not seen nor ear heard its glories. And even as to the present, we probably do not appreciate all our privilege. Is it nothing to belong to the noble army of saints and martyrs? Is it nothing to have our names joined with the purest and best of the ages? Bless God for our glorious earthly as well as our more glorious heavenly heritage!

9. Last of all, but not least, comes the blessedness of *self-denial* (v. 35). How precious this new beatitude of our Saviour! The paradox in it stamps it as His who said we must lose our life to find it. And we can see how Paul came to preserve it and cherish it—Paul, who said that he was dead, but that he lived in Christ. But it was not its paradoxical form that made Paul love it. He had tried it and, like his dear Lord before him, had found it true. May the Saviour, who gave up all things, and who for all his travail is still satisfied, give us a like mind with his, that we may understand the strange joy that was his, the joy of the sacrifice of self!

PAUL AT JERUSALEM.

ACTS 21:27-39.

PAUL'S attitude towards the Jewish law must be taken into account in order to understand the reason for the tumult at Jerusalem and the injustice of those who led it.

Paul spoke as vigorously as one could speak against the law as a means of salvation. Justification, the acceptance of the soul as just, that is, holy, in the eyes of God, was only by means of faith in Jesus Christ, by which his death on the cross is made our own and accepted by God as an atonement for our sins and his perfect righteousness is imparted to us, so that God treats us as though we were and always had been spotlessly innocent. The law had no such function. Let a man try to live up to it as hard as he chose, yet he would still be seen to be guilty in the eyes of God. The law therefore was powerless to save.

At the same time Paul was a Jew with the most intense national feeling. So much did he love his brother Israelites that he could almost have wished himself accursed from God if thereby they might be saved. Paul loved the old religious habits of his childhood, and whenever he went to Jerusalem he seems to have found great enjoyment in going up to the temple to celebrate the feasts. Not because such things had any value for salvation (which is in Christ alone), but because they gave spiritual comfort and joy.

So far as his fellow-Christians were concerned, Paul held that their relation to the law should be determined by their own antecedents. If a man were born a Gentile Paul would not counsel him to learn Jewish religious hab-

its. If a man was born a Jew, however, there was no harm in his keeping the old law so long as it was understood not to have saving power. He himself acted according to circumstances. He was a Jewish Christian to Jewish Christians and a Gentile Christian to Gentile Christians.

When Paul came to Jerusalem in the year 58 A. D., he found he had been preceded by a report that he was utterly opposed to Jewish Christians observing any of the old Jewish habits and that he tried to turn them from them. It was proposed that he should do something to show that he did not thus condemn the old Jewish customs by taking up one of them openly and conspicuously: he was to share in a vow which was being performed by certain men, which was of such a character that everybody would know that Paul was occupied with it. This he did.

But just as he was completing the accomplishment of the vow some Jews from Ephesus found him in the temple, and repeating the old calumnies about his opposition to Jewish life (which were shown to be calumnies by Paul's presence there in the very act of fulfilling a Jewish vow), raised a tumult which almost resulted in the loss of his life.

The episode suggests study in four directions.

I. *Paul.*

1. He was truly a lover of his own people. Wherever he went he sought them out first, not only because strategically this was wisest, but because he truly liked to be with them. He was never above feeling satisfaction in the thought that he had been born a Jew. And no higher encomiums of the old Jews could be imagined than such as could be gathered from the writings and speeches of Paul.

He kept up his Jewish habits of life, or he would not have been tolerated among Jews wherever he went even for a moment. He loved to go to the feasts at the capital. He advised one who was born a Jew when he became a Christian not to feel obliged to abandon Jewish rites (1 Cor. 7 : 18). Undoubtedly Paul had more real sympathy with Jewish religious ideas than many of those in the crowd who condemned him.

2. There was a possibility, we might safely say a certainty, that Paul's position would be misunderstood. For while he kept up his Jewish habits it was not because he thought (as the Jews thought) that they had saving power. They were external matters connected chiefly with ways of living and ways of worshipping. They were not really essential to the religious life, but only helpful in it, if one thought them helpful and used them aright. Among Gentiles Paul did not observe them. The Jews looked upon them as necessary for all ; Paul looked upon them as good only for those who found them good. In a certain limited sense Paul stood by Jewish habits. And yet his removing them from the class of necessities to the class of things optional was undoubtedly the first step towards their abolition. Spontaneously they would be abandoned one by one, as new habits, formed under the new ideas of Christianity, began to spread. Paul's position thus had such complex relations that it was difficult to be understood and pretty certain to be misrepresented.

3. His immediate intention in the matter which brought him into difficulty was good. He had no intention towards the Jews. He was not trying to conciliate them. They were not in his thought at all. His mind was upon the thousands of Jews who had become Christians (Acts 21 : 20) who were still zealous for the law, i. e.,

kept up faithfully Jewish habits of living. For them Paul held that this was perfectly right (so long of course as they did not ascribe saving power to such habits). He had been reported as taking the position that they were wrong. In order to put himself into cordial relations with them and to reassure them concerning himself, he undertook the open performance of a vow. His design in the matter was wholly honorable and kind. Paul was not the belligerent, heavy-handed person he has sometimes been painted. He was strong, sometimes sharp, but always thoughtful, tender-hearted, and sympathetic in the highest degree.

II. *The disturbers.*

1. Their motive was hatred towards Paul. They came down from Ephesus full of their experiences of Paul's troubles there. At Ephesus they had been thwarted. It was not a Jewish city. And even though it was Gentile, and Paul had attacked Gentile life, yet he had not been abandoned to injustice. At Ephesus Paul had some chance of justice, and the Jews were hopeless of thwarting him. At Jerusalem the tables were turned. There Jewish sentiment was not only enormously preponderant, it was also intense beyond words. The opportunity denied at Ephesus was offered at Jerusalem: at last Paul might be put out of the way. At last this man, who had made such an impress on Jews everywhere, who had dared to say that because a man was a Jew he was not necessarily acceptable to God, who had testified of a Saviour who had been condemned by the highest Jewish court and had been crucified, at last this man had put himself in their power, and they were going to end his troublesomeness once for all.

2. They carried out their purpose by spreading

skilful misrepresentations of Paul's position. They said (a) that he taught all men everywhere against the Jews, (b) against Jewish law, (c) against the worship of the temple, and (d) had defiled the temple by introducing Gentiles into the court of the Israelites (vv. 28, 29). This charge was a deft combination of truth and falsehood. For the wickedest lie is not that which is downright, for that can easily be disproven, but that which is subtly, insinuatingly exaggerative, where the admission of the innocent element of truth which lies at its foundation puts the man who is repelling it in the attitude of a culprit. Paul had not taught against the Jews by any means; he had honored them everywhere; he had proclaimed himself a Jew. But of course he had said that being a Jew would not save one. He had not taught against Jewish law; he had honored it in his own conduct. At the same time he had said that it was not binding on Gentiles. He had not declaimed against the temple; on the contrary, he had worshipped in it when at Jerusalem. But he had not held that it was the only place for acceptably worshipping God. As for the charge that he introduced Gentiles into the Jewish court of the temple, that was an outright lie, and derived its appearance of truth only from the fact that Paul had been seen in the city with the Gentile Trophimus. The things alleged against Paul had back of them something which he would have had to admit as true. But it was exaggerated, misinterpreted, and supplemented by an absolute lie. Nothing more difficult to escape from could have been devised than this involved, subtle combination of the true and the false. At this moment in an extraordinary way Paul was having fellowship with the sufferings of Christ.

3. The strength of the attack against Paul lay in its

appeal to the religious feelings of the crowd. That which was best in them was used for the lowest ends. The holy relation of the soul to God was perverted into a means of venting hatred. *Corruptio optimi pessima*. Nothing is more awful in human nature than the possibility of crime in the name of religion; and how frequently it has darkened the page of history. Israel had unholy dances about the golden calf. The Canaanites had their obscene worship of Ashtoreth. Rome worshipped the emperor, that the emperor might have full sway for irresponsible indulgence of every whim and every lust. What a catalogue it is, from the burning of the martyrs down to the pious fraud who gets a living by imposing on the open sympathy of kind-hearted religious people to-day! And some people are so indiscriminating as to lay the blame of all this upon religion. It is as just to condemn the real coin for the existence of the counterfeit.

III. *The crowd.*

1. They accepted as true the lies of the Ephesian Jews. They had courts whose business it was to investigate such offences as were alleged against Paul. They had machinery for punishing any one guilty of crime, and if Paul was not guilty of crime he did not deserve punishment. These implements, intended for the protection of others from wrong and themselves from guilt through wronging the innocent, were not for one moment regarded by them. Without investigation, without so much as a question, they accepted as true what might easily have been shown to be false. And it was only through the providence of God that they were not guilty of murdering Paul as they had before murdered his Lord.

2. Just as readily they accepted the motives of the Ephesian Jews as honorable. What sanctity! What zeal

for the temple of the Lord ! Surely these men from Ephesus were good representatives of God's own people to enlighten the Gentiles. And all the time the real motive of these scheming Ephesians was nothing more than vile, unscrupulous hatred. The people of Jerusalem might have gone to the bottom of Paul's case if they had wanted to ; but they did not want to, because

3. They were already prejudiced against him. The words of the Ephesians, " This is the man " (v. 28), show that Paul was known by reputation. The people had their minds already made up concerning him. They did not want investigation upon his case. All they wanted was to have him pointed out. And yet Paul loved them truly as no other man living probably loved them ; he had a deep sympathy with their peculiar ideas ; he was willing to sacrifice much for them ; he had in his possession and was trying to give to them that which would bless them more than anything else imaginable. Again, as often before, Jerusalem knew not the day of her visitation. In her sinful prejudice she was ready, consistently with her attitude all through history, to slay the best of her sons.

IV. *The outcome.*

1. God was a factor at work upon which the Jews were not counting. At just the last moment when help was of use, down came the soldiery of that Roman power which the Lord used, even while it was unwilling and unwitting, as one of the great instruments for the accomplishment of his purposes in history. " Those whom neither the majesty of God nor pious respect for the temple could restrain from madness, respect for a profane man now subdues." (Calvin.) And in the conduct of that man the God whom they so impiously disregarded was at work. Thus far could their madness go and no farther.

His word, which can check the mighty ocean, put its restraint upon the wrath of men, and Paul, like Joseph, like David, like Jeremiah, like Daniel, was safe.

2. An immediate result for good was brought about, in that Paul had an opportunity to address the multitude. Such an opportunity he might have sought long and in vain. It came to him without his seeking. There, in the same courts which had resounded with the words of the Son of God on that day, "the great day of the feast," Paul now raised his voice, a true echo of that other. On Mars' Hill, the seat of the world's learning, Paul had testified to Christ. In the temple at Jerusalem, the world's religious centre, he was now repeating that testimony. And the way for it had been opened altogether by God. The coolness with which Paul not only asked to be allowed to speak, but went on to make his address, would seem to show that he felt, even amid the surging of that mad crowd bent on taking his life, that the Lord was even then guiding him and using him for His glory.

3. The riot in the temple had a bearing far off in the future. Behind those shouting Jews Paul might have imagined he could see the dim outlines of the awful throne of Cæsar. At the third world-centre, Rome, in the presence of the august ruler of the empire, Paul must yet deliver his testimony for Christ before his mission would be ended. The testimony at Rome was made possible by the riot at Jerusalem. And so the wrath of man ministered to the praise of God. The Jews sought to kill Paul, and they succeeded in giving him opportunity to hold up the cross before the Lord of the world. How marvellous are the ways of Him who sitteth even on the throne of the heavens, making all things work together for good to them that love him!

V. *Final lessons.*

1. Our failures as well as our successes have their place in God's plan. Paul was trying to conciliate some of his fellow-Christians when he fell into trouble. He wanted to commend himself to them; he only succeeded in removing himself from all intercourse with them. And yet what a small thing was that intercourse compared with the larger intercourse which was opened up through its failure. God not only exchanges our failures for success, he makes them means of success.

2. Inferences from others' actions are always dangerous. The Jews imputed to Paul motives that did not belong to him. They reasoned too quickly from effect to cause. They were too sure of the accuracy of their own reasoning ability. Let us be careful how we put meanings into others' conduct. We cannot read their hearts. We are not the discerners of intention. Judgment belongs only to God.

3. A multitude is a dangerous leader. It is good advice to keep always out of crowds. We should not follow a multitude to do evil, nor should we commit ourselves to its domination even when it professes to seek good. Self-possession (like Paul's), personal independence in full consciousness of personal responsibility, save us the chagrin and the sorrow which follow the "stampede." Lieber has shown with the most convincing acuteness that *Vox populi, vox Dei* is unscriptural and irreligious. Beware of the multitude. Serve thou God and him only.

PAUL BEFORE FELIX.

ACTS 24: 10-25.

PAUL makes an address on the steps of the Castle Antonia to the Jews; a tumult arises on his mention of his mission to the Gentiles; he is taken into the castle by the governor; he is about to be tortured by scourging that he may be compelled to give true testimony concerning himself (according to a custom of the time), when the mention of his being a Roman citizen intervenes; in the morning a council of the Jews is called by the governor to find out the cause of the disturbance; Paul appears before the council to make his defence; a new tumult arises and he is again taken to the castle for safety; the governor discovers that there is a plot against Paul's life and sends him by night with a military escort to Cæsarea to Felix, the governor of the province; five days after the high-priest, with some elders and Tertullus, a hired orator, comes down from Jerusalem; they lodge information before the governor against Paul; Felix calls upon Paul to speak.

In the passage before us we have an interesting and impressive picture of Paul. His danger only serves to bring out his heroic qualities. We have here also a picture of Felix—who represents to us the way in which some men are often affected by the gospel. We turn therefore from the study of Paul to scrutinize this very fully described case of the pathology of conscience.

I. Felix's impression of Paul.

1. Paul's address. He was in serious trouble. There was no question that his presence in the temple had been

followed by a tumult. As to the cause of it there were two sides to be heard. The accusing side had spoken. Every advantage had been taken of whatever in the circumstances seemed to be against Paul. A flattering, speciously honest, downright hostile address had been made by Tertullus, a professional pleader. It is a mark of Paul's genius that he was able with superb skill to meet and to overcome this professional rhetorician. His reply has in it four heads. (a) Introduction. Tertullus had begun with flattery. Paul begins with respect. He recognizes Felix as the authorized representative of the Government under which Providence has placed him; and while he has no respect for the man and does not hesitate to tell him so presently, yet he remembers the man's office, and he accepts the position of defendant before him with dignity. He refers to Felix's somewhat long occupancy of office, which would make one feel more secure of obtaining justice from him than from a novice, and he suggests that it will be an easy matter for an experienced administrator like Felix to get at the bottom of the difficulty in which Paul finds himself. (b) Rebuttal. He mentions the brief time he had been in Jerusalem—entirely insufficient to accomplish all the deep plots alleged against him by the Jews. He denies the charges they make against him so pointedly that it becomes a question of veracity between him and them. (c) Explanation. How had he happened to be in Jerusalem at all, and what was he doing in the temple? His conduct remained suspicious until it had been adequately explained. Paul says that, after a new fashion to be sure, but yet really, he is at one religiously with those who oppose him. He serves the same God and accepts the same Scriptures. He has the same hope of a future life, with the resurrection of just

and unjust. He has the same purpose which they claim to have: to have a conscience void of offence towards God and men always. Accordingly it was not unnatural for him to come to Jerusalem. The immediate occasion, however, was his bringing up alms to certain poor people in the city—surely a not unworthy object. In Jerusalem it was natural for him (after due purification) to have found his way to the temple. (d) Demand for evidence. But what about the tumult? Ah, if only the men who raised the tumult had been present, if only those Jews from Ephesus had been brought down to be examined, Paul might have had as witnesses for him the very men who had raised this trouble. These men should have been present. But since that cannot be, let those who are here tell what they will. Paul is willing to have the truth come out even from his enemies.

2. The characteristics of this speech probably made a deeper impression on Felix than its contents. (a) Candor. Paul was evidently telling as plainly, fully, and simply as he could the very truth. He did not overdo the matter. He was not so hurried in confessing everything that one could suspect him of confessing more than was true. He did not have that eagerness to conciliate which led Tertullus into a flattery that made it evident he was going to try to deceive. Paul felt that he was a Roman citizen standing before a Roman judge who was bound to do him justice. There was no need of flattery. Due respect for the office and official experience of the judge having been expressed, what remained was a simple narrative of facts. An experienced judge is not often deceived as to the honesty of a witness. (b) Fearlessness was evident in every word of Paul's. He was not overcome by the danger of his situation. He was nothing

daunted by the dignity, number, influence, and zeal of his persecutors. He was not embarrassed by the position of the man, the friend of emperors, before whom he must speak. There was in him no flippancy, no bravado, but just that quiet real courage which had made it possible for him to turn upon the marble steps of the Castle Antonia and make a collected, well-arranged address to the mob that had been howling for his life. (c) Uprightness was written over every word which Paul uttered. The good man is known not by his rising to combatively affirm, "I am good," but by his saying whatever he will, ordinary or extraordinary, and giving out his character, as bad men do also, indirectly and unconsciously. A man cannot help being and acting himself. Let him try ever so hard to seem to be that which he is not, yet in time this, like every forgery, will proclaim itself a lie. There are some witnesses whom lawyers do not dare to permit to go on the stand to testify. Paul was one who, without counsel, might say all he would; for he was a good man.

3. What was the effect of this speech upon Felix?

(a) He recognized that no case had been made out against Paul. The main witnesses had, for some unaccountable reason, not been brought into court. Those who were present were, without disguise, desirous of Paul's conviction. The prosecution had arranged not for justice but for punishment. No Roman brought up to reverence law, and especially experienced as Felix was in the administration of law, could be deceived by such a conspiracy to defraud justice. The case against the prisoner had plainly not been made out. (b) A postponement for further inquiry followed. Felix would consult the commandant at Jerusalem on an approaching visit.

But why not discharge the prisoner? Was a man to be held guilty until he was proven innocent? A case had been brought against Paul and the evidence had not supported it. It was Felix's duty to dismiss the prisoner; but to conciliate the Jews he held him for further investigation. Does this trifling with justice in the interest of one's own political position remind us of no similar occurrence twenty-eight years before this? At this point Felix takes the first step of those which have given him, not unjustly, the name of "the second Pilate." (c) At the same time his sense of right, being still feebly operative (as in Pilate), will not allow him to treat the prisoner as though he had been convicted of crime. He shows him some indulgence, relaxing the rigors of prison. Paul was not to be chained, and his friends were to have full access to him. So Felix tried to compromise with conscience. A very difficult feat, as yet unaccomplished, so far as men are known.

II. *Felix's impression of Christianity.*

1. He had some curiosity about it, and after certain days came and sent for Paul and heard him speak about Jesus Christ. Just how much this meant to Felix we do not know. We must not read too much into the passage. It may be that Drusilla, his Jewish wife, was the author of the idea of studying Paul. She was a daughter of Agrippa I. and a sister of Agrippa II. She still adhered to the Jewish religion although she had married a Roman. "As a member of the Herodian family she had unquestionably heard the Christian religion mentioned on many occasions, and may have been desirous of seeing and hearing for herself one of the principal representatives of the church." (Lechler.) Felix must surely have had some interest in the matter himself or he would not have accom-

panied her on her inquiry. But even a little curiosity is sometimes enough to lead one to Christ.

2. Paul's speech. (a) The subject. The whole of Paul's address is not preserved. What is given seems to imply much that went before, and a final coming to the practical conclusion, which concerned (1) righteousness, (2) temperance, and (3) judgment. (1) Righteousness is the aim of the Christian life. Christ died that he might purify from us the guilt of sin and impute to us his own righteousness. He rose from the dead and took his throne in glory in order that he might send us the Holy Spirit, who should ever create new righteousness in us, directed by Christ. To be holy as God is holy, and so to glorify him by reflecting his excellence, is the chief end of man. (2) Temperance, or self-control; referring to the subjugation of the passions and the holding of the whole life in submission to the will of God. This in a certain sense is the negative side of the righteousness which Paul has just mentioned. (3) Judgment to come. Christianity derives its hold upon many men by appealing to high motives and ambitions. But all do not feel these, all do not desire to do right and to serve God. To such also Christianity has its force through its appeal to fear. If a man will not be led to serve God because he wants to, he may because he is afraid not to. Fear is not the highest feeling of the heart, but it is common, more common than higher feelings, and is justly appealed to when truth is not violated. Christ warned men constantly of the ill-results of evil-doing. He told only the truth about it, which it would have been unkind not to tell. Men say now that they will not be scared into the kingdom of heaven. But if they are not moved by higher impulses do they deserve to have the lower also neglected? And men unsaved

ought to fear, if they do not. (b) These themes, doubtless treated in a general way, had also their personal application. (1) Righteousness, or justice (as the word might also have been understood by a Greek), had been outraged by Felix in that he had not let Paul go, although no crime had been proven against him. (2) Temperance, self-control, or chastity (as the word might have been understood), had been shamefully violated by Felix. Drusilla, the woman who sat beside him, had been given in marriage to Azizus, king of Emesa. But "when Felix was procurator for Judæa he saw her, and being captivated by her beauty, persuaded her to desert her husband, transgress the laws of her country, and marry himself." (Josephus.) (3) In view of such a past Felix and Drusilla needed, if ever man and woman did need, a faithful, sharp, kind preacher to tell them of that awful judgment of God which remained in store for them unless they repented of their deep-dyed sins. (c) Thus Paul was faithful to the truth. It is not faithfulness to truth to speak of such a part of it (which is no doubt as true as any other part) as has no bearing on the lives and consciences of the particular people who hear. Preaching truth is preaching such truth as the hearers ought to have preached to them. Yet Paul was not offensive. He was personal in the way he chose his subject, but not in the manner of its delivery, so far as we can see.

3. No wonder that Felix was convicted by this address. No wonder his heart was smitten with fear. He had been used to association with sycophants, who would flatter him in the face and stab him in the back. But here was a man who had no fear of him and sought no favor of him, who boldly, kindly told him the unvarnished truth about himself. What a privilege to truly know one's self,

even if it be to find defects, for that is the way to perfection. But such an experience is not comfortable. As Tyndale translates it, "Felix trembled" (A. V.). Well he might have done so, as in the presence of the fearless servant of God he found himself, guilty and vile, confronted with the awful judgment throne of God. Tacitus says of him that he used the position of a king with the spirit of a slave. His spirit now certainly was that of the worst kind of a slave—the slave of passion.

III. *Felix's disposal of Christianity.*

1. He let the bad elements in him prevail. Paul faithfully warned him against them and their consequences. But he loved the flesh-pots of his degraded Egypt. Instead of honoring him who had faithfully told him truth, he kept him in the prison, thinking that some rich friends might be led to offer bribes on his behalf (v. 26). And finally, when Felix went out of office he left Paul still bound, "desiring to gain favor with the Jews" (v. 27), who were about to complain of him (as they complained of every governor) to the emperor. Whatever awakening of conscience Felix really felt he subdued again by not repenting of sin.

2. Consequently he was led to postpone his dealing with the matter of his relation to God. "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee" (v. 25). Oh deluded, willingly deluded Felix! There is no convenient time but the present. Thou hast had the day of thy visitation from God, and thy decision of postponement, although thou dost not guess it, is

3. Final. Why is it that postponing the receiving of salvation is so apt to be its complete rejection? Because (a) it is going back again to the ever-increasing domination of sin; (b) conscience unanswered becomes deadened

and its voice is more and more feeble ; (c) the desire for a nobler life awakened in us by the Holy Spirit is subdued when unsatisfied ; (d) we are not so susceptible to the presence of the Spirit when we do not obey him. So far as we know men, they do not mean to be lost. But by not being willing to be saved in God's day, when the gospel is offered to them, they put themselves in such a position that the operation of the common but inexorable laws of mental and spiritual life makes it more and more certain that they will never accept Christ.

IV. *Lessons.*

1. The word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword. It searches us out. It "finds" us (as Coleridge said).

2. Selfishness is the cause of men's rejection of Christ. They love their sinful ways too well to deny self and follow him.

3. The great lesson (oh that it might be burned into the heart of every one who reads !) is that postponing the acceptance of Christ is eternally dangerous. Suspect every motive that keeps you from Christ. No such motive is adequate and justifiable

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA.

ACTS 26:19-32.

A CHEMIST who is experimenting with some newly-discovered element keeps a record showing the various reactions which occur when this element is brought into combination with other substances. The book of Acts is largely a diary of spiritual chemistry: it shows what happened when the gospel of Jesus Christ was brought into contact with different classes and conditions of men. When Paul presented it to Festus and Agrippa it was received in a peculiar way and had peculiar consequences.

Festus was the new governor who had been sent out to take the place of the recalled Felix. Festus (says Lewin) "had a straightforward honesty about him which forms a strong contrast to the mean rascality of his predecessor [Felix]. He certainly did not do all the justice that he might have done; but allowing somewhat for the natural desire to ingratiate himself with people of his government, his conduct on the whole was exemplary, and his firmness in resisting the unjust demands of the Jews cannot fail to elicit our admiration." Agrippa was a different sort of person entirely. He was an effeminate, debauched, morally dead sort of a person, such as one can often find on an Oriental throne. He was a king who retained his office in dependence upon the Roman procurator (compare the relation of the rajahs of India and the English governor-general). Bernice, the beautiful profligate who accompanied him on his congratulatory visit to Festus at Cæsarea, having tired of three husbands, was

now living (as Josephus tells us the common belief was) in shameful relations with Agrippa, who was her own brother. "Her subsequent connection with Vespasian and Titus made her name familiar to the Roman writers. Several of them, as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Juvenal, either mention her expressly or allude to her." (Hackett.)

This was an unpromising audience for the preaching of the gospel of Christ. But Paul believed that gospel was meant for great as well as small (v. 22), for profligate as well as virtuous, for the whole sinful world. He accepted the duty that lay before him, and, in spite of interruption and sneering contempt, delivered his message concerning the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

I. *The character of the address.*

Paul now, as often before and after, told in a simple, straightforward way the story of his own life. There is no evidence for Christ more convincing than that of Christian experience. Better than to argue and expound the philosophy of salvation was it for Paul to tell how he, a Jew of a most violent sort, became a humble follower of Jesus Christ; and there is no evidence to-day coming down to us out of that early age more powerful than this same story of Paul recorded in Scripture. Remembering Paul's mind, his genius, his predisposition against Christianity, his becoming a Christian demands explanation. It is no wonder that the skeptical Baur, who thought himself able to explain away all the supernatural in the New Testament, when he came to the conversion of Paul felt compelled to accept it as miraculous. Christianity does not stand or fall with Paul; it is greater than any man who ever accepted it. But how much we should have missed of corroboration to our faith if we did not have the story of the journey to Damascus.

1. God and man worked together in Paul's Christian life (v. 19).

a. There was first the heavenly vision vouchsafed to Paul for his spiritual enlightenment and guidance. His conversion was wrought from without. He had not been yearning for Christ, but had been opposing him, when God came upon the scene and changed things miraculously. And nothing short of a supernatural experience could have wrought the alteration that appeared in Saul of Tarsus. God can do wonders when he will. The hardest and most impenetrably stony heart becomes the warm heart of living flesh under his converting touch. And God must work wonders if men are to be converted to him; for even the most eager soul cannot make itself new. God is the only Creator in the spiritual as in the natural realm. And he is ever ready to do his work. He gives us all visions, not miraculous like Paul's, but truly supernatural. He shows us heavenly things and calls us towards them.

b. Paul's conversion was brought about only when he had submitted to the vision. He was not disobedient unto it (v. 19). "Not even Paul's conversion was irresistible" (Bengel). That is to say, it was not accomplished without the action of his own will. God works in us wonders, both to will and to do—not against the will, but in the will, penetrating as it were inside of it. Our change from glory into glory is thus by the consent of our will ever to God's. So God entreats us ever to come and obey him, and if we are not his in Christ, it is because we will not be. The heavenly vision is freely given, but we must not be disobedient unto it.

2. Paul's mission. He was called for a divine purpose. He had a work to do. This he recognized himself

at the very time when he had the vision, for his first words were, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

a. His mission was to declare far and wide, to both Jew and Gentile, "that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance" (v. 20). He was to be a teacher to lead men to God. The ethical contents of his message were repentance and righteousness. He was to help men to better living. He was to take his place alongside the prophets of the Old Testament times, alongside Jesus Christ who was the personal fulfilment of their prophecies, who elevated and broadened their ethical ideas. "Be good," was the gist of his deliverance, as of every other preacher's in all the world.

b. But Christ's atonement, although it is not mentioned here, is presupposed as the ground of this ethical teaching (see vv. 18 and 23). Picturing the glories of a noble life, howsoever temptingly it may be done, is not enough, as Paul knew well by his own experience, to lead one to moral excellence. Man's sufficiency is in God alone. And God's chosen way of bestowing it on men is only through their faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ. The Christian is ever pointed to a vision of holiness towards which he must courageously and unremittingly aspire. But back behind that vision there is always, sometimes brightly, sometimes dimly, but always to be discerned, the cross. In that is his hope of some day having realized in himself the vision of which it is the background.

3. Paul's persistence in his calling. That Christ was helping him so that he could do all things did not make it any the less necessary for him to fight a good fight himself. For God works not without man.

a. Opposition arose to Paul's accomplishment of his

mission (v. 21). That God was empowering him meant not (as we often wish it might mean for us) the removal of obstacles, but their conquest. The Christian life is a triumph, not by escape from opposition, but by the surmounting of developed opposition in order to victory. The projection of Christianity into a heretofore unchristianized community ought to have antagonism for its reaction as certainly as litmus paper is discolored by the touch of acid.

b. Paul obtained "the help that is from God" (v. 22, R. V.) His mission came to him without his own selection, and the power to accomplish it was also other than his own. It would have been a hard situation indeed if Paul had been given a superhuman mission which he must fulfil with merely human power. God is not so unjust. With our calling he gives us his own help. He tells us to go, and equips us for going. How thoroughly are we without excuse if we do not accomplish his will.

c. Paul stood unharmed as a result of this divine empowerment (v. 22). He had been in dangers, great dangers, such as no man we have ever known encountered; but he had been safe through them all. The powers against him could not bring his life to an end until God's hour had come, and when that had come Paul was willing to die.

d. Testifying, testifying ever, was the work of his life (v. 22). Talk seems the most unsubstantial part of a man's life-product. But long after the tents Paul made had rotted into tatters his words lived in the hearts and lives of his fellow-men. The unsubstantial product which we put forth with the lips is that which is most abiding of all that we create. And so it is not strange that the foolishness of preaching, the impinging of ethereal sounds

upon the ear, should after all be the most powerful and lasting of human forces.

e. Paul was impartial in his life-work (v. 22). He testified both to small and great. All men were men to him, and he might have had for his motto, "*Homo sum, et nihil humani a me alienum puto.*" Nationality, age, social position, wealth, learning made no difference to Paul. "A man's a man for a' that." He gave the gospel to every one, for every one needed it.

4. The contents of his preaching concerning Christ are given. He preached

a. A suffering Christ. Christ was the prophet by eminence. There had been other prophets before him. Was he but *primus inter pares*? No, he had suffered. But other prophets had suffered too, and for others beside themselves. Yes, but Christ had suffered the very penalty of others' sins, entering into the place where they should have stood. He was thus the only Saviour. He did not die as the result of the machinations of foes, as a mere historical happening (though they were the occasion of his death); nor as a martyr to truth alone (though he was that); but in our stead, purposing to bear our sins. This was a stumbling-block to Jews, who could not believe the Messiah could die, and foolishness to the Greeks, who could not adjust a vicarious atonement to the articulations of their philosophies; and for ever the "how" of this substitutionary suffering is hid from the mind of man. Nevertheless it is true, and is witnessed to be true in that it is the very power of God unto salvation; Christ crucified, the laughing-stock of history, is history's only hope.

b. A rising Christ (v. 23). Here again we meet with something which seems to antagonize all modern ways of thinking, as it antagonized all those that were ancient.

The immortality of the soul is a widely accepted belief even among the heathen. But the resurrection of the body is difficult even to heathen credulity. Nevertheless it is true, and a necessary part of the contents of Christian preaching. If Christ be not raised then is our faith vain. The resurrection was a necessary part of Christ's saving work. Without that salvation would not have been complete. The word "first" in Paul's expression is an adjective, not an adverb. "This word designates the cause rather than the order of time; because Christ rising again emerged victor of death and lord of life, that he might reign for ever and make his own to be sharers in his own blest immortality." (Calvin.) Christ arose, not as the first instance (see Matt. 27 : 53), but as the author of resurrection.

c. A world-enlightening Christ (v. 23). He called himself the light of the world, and those who were his disciples the same, because what he was they were to be in the world. And what was the character of Christ's enlightenment? The bringing of salvation into the world's night of sin. The emphatic point in Paul's expression is "both to the people and to the Gentiles." This was a new idea, impossible as it seems to us now that any other should ever have been held. Paul stood for it consistently all his life. He was the apostle of the Gentiles. The gospel is just as much meant for those who we think would not appreciate it—the worst criminals in the slums, the stupidest heathen, the most self-reliant skeptics—as for the most devout and eager souls.

II. *The reception of Paul's address.*

1. Festus. He interrupted Paul with a loud voice. The resurrection was a piece of nonsense of which he did not care to hear any more.

a. He did not believe what Paul was saying. He considered it madness, irrationality (v. 24). He looked upon Paul as one of those speculative oddities (not uncommon in that speculative age) who took hold of some fantastic notion and dreamed of it until they imagined it truth. He had supposed from Paul's bearing that he was a strong, hard-headed thinker. He found out (as he thought) that he was only a bewildered mystic. A Roman wanted facts. Paul was giving him fancies. He had had enough of it. So easily do we men imagine that our minds are the measure of truth!

b. He had contempt for Paul. His expression denotes it. With the pride of his nation he looked down on whosoever differed with him. "What I think is not only true, but honorable and attractive; what others think, who do not agree with me, is not only untrue but silly." Oh, wise Festus! This that is before thee in this chained prisoner shall yet put the wisdom of this world to scorn, showing itself to be the eternal wisdom of God.

c. Paul's reply. Without resenting the scorn in Festus' interruption, Paul quietly and courteously defends himself. Far from being mad, he is speaking in full sobriety (as is witnessed by his self-possession under this contemptuous and trying interruption), and with full discernment that what he says is the very truth. The reply, brief in its contents, but pointed and impressive in its manner, was Paul's final attempt to get hold of a heart that had plainly been untouched by the story of his life.

2. Agrippa. From the uninfluenced Festus Paul turned to the dissolute king, who underneath his wickedness still had something which had been touched by Paul's proclamation of Christ.

a. Agrippa was merely a curious spectator of Paul,

but as he sat there he was unwillingly being tried by the great touchstone of life—the gospel of Jesus Christ then and there offered to him. Agrippa, we may be sure, had not wanted to know the truth, nor had he desired to have God try his soul as he was trying it then. But God seeks us when we do not seek him. And whether we will or not, the gospel is the criterion by the presentation of which every soul is saved or lost.

b. Agrippa had some knowledge of Christ (v. 26). It may have been superficial, and yet it carried responsibility with it. Paul appealed to it. It had in it the beginnings of salvation for a willing heart. As God looks down upon us he seems to be asking, "Do you know anything about Christ?" All of us can say, "Yes, somewhat." Then God seems to say, "For that knowledge, little or great, you are responsible; for it has in it the power of salvation."

c. Agrippa was evidently influenced by his companions. His manner was plainly not that of an independent, fearless man. After the interruption of Festus, which showed his opinion of Paul, Agrippa certainly would not admit that Paul's words meant anything to him. As to so many others, to him man meant more than God.

d. He gives an ironical retort, as much as to say, "Ah! you are trying your rapid method of making Christians on me, are you! Before I know it, I suppose, you will have me converted." He patterns his reply in accordance with the spirit of Festus' interruption, adding flippancy to scorn.

e. His real feeling was concealed. How much he felt under the pressure of Paul's personal appeal we cannot judge. But he felt something. God's call was at last heard and recognized. But it was not obeyed.

f. Paul's reply. As he met the hard, unbelieving Festus with a simple protest of his own truthfulness, so he met the unwillingly moved Agrippa with a sober and infinitely touching prayer. With both men he left behind a seed, which might perhaps spring and blossom unto eternal life.

III. *General lessons.*

1. There are voices of God everywhere. No soul but hears them. Are we obedient unto them?

2. Christ is the centre of Christian truth and life and work. From him should come our thoughts, our emotions, and our deeds. Let life be to us Christ.

3. The heart of man is desperately wicked. Who could resist Paul's preaching? Festus and Agrippa did. It is possible to resist the preaching of the Spirit of God.

PAUL SHIPWRECKED.

ACTS 27:20-44.

THERE is something very impressive in the even, consistent solidity of Paul's Christian life. With many, perhaps most men, there are times when the sudden entrance of a stranger upon their actions and thoughts would not be entirely helpful to their Christian name. But come upon Paul at any time and under any circumstances, and you find him always the same earnest and yet completely self-possessed servant of Jesus Christ. In a very true way for him to live was Christ. He had no purposes of which Christ was not the goal. He felt no joys of which Christ was not the chief cause.

If there is anything which will make a man thoughtful of himself above everything else it is danger of losing his life.

“Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
No soul that liveth longs for death.”

Set before a man the probability that in a short time he will be dead, and his thoughts will most likely be divided between terror and a desperate planning of escape. Especially will it try his soul if those circumstances be lacking which conduce to heroism, if the manner of exit from life which presents itself seems wholly wasteful—as by a shipwreck. When a man dies for his country there seems a degree of compensation to himself as well as others; but when a man dies by accident it seems a sad dissipation of vital energy. How did Paul act under such circumstances? He gives to us a truly heroic picture of *an unselfish man in a selfish world*.

Let us see first how Paul's companions behaved under the stress of the immediate probability of death.

I. *The selfishness of Paul's companions.*

i. The sailors. They were men accustomed to the sea, best able of all on board to take care of themselves in the event of the ship's going to pieces, charged moreover with the care of the lives with them.

a. Their overwhelming desire was to save themselves. "They were seeking to fall out of the ship" regardless of consequences. Life is dear to every man. It is unnatural to think anything else. But to a moral and spiritual being it is conceivable that there may be things dearer than life. Witness the martyrs, the men who have died on the battle-fields of the world, the humble workers who have stood by their posts that others might save what they lost. We do not blame the sailors for wanting to escape—Paul wanted to escape probably as much as they did. But they are justly blamable for having no other pressing desire in their hearts than just to keep themselves alive. They were cowards of the most abject and truly heathenish sort.

b. They forgot others. There were the soldiers and the prisoners in their charge. Life was just as precious to them as to the sailors themselves. But, like all selfish people, these saw things only from their point of view. They looked upon the world as an arena where men fight against one another like wild animals. They believed in the struggle for existence. Brotherhood meant nothing to them. So they schemed to take the one boat, in which there seemed any hope of safety, and let the rest of the people on board take care of themselves. When one is enamored of his own self, and fancies that the most important thing is to keep himself alive, he becomes capable

of selling his mother and wife and children to keep his own life. Just as though living were all there is to life.

c. The sailors abandoned their duty. They were guardians of the ship and all in it—especially the passengers. These had been put into their hands to take care of and to guard and to bring safely to land. But duty seems to have meant nothing to their minds. They were looking only towards self; duty looks away from self. Its essence is obligation, and that implies at least two persons. They were not trying to do right—they made no inquiry concerning it. They were trying to do only that which was pleasant for themselves. Let us be grateful to God that he has so constituted this world that those who live only with such selfish purposes are destined to be cheated of their gratification.

2. The soldiers. They had already made a decision to kill the prisoners whom they were guarding "lest any of them should swim out and escape" (v. 42). They as well as the sailors showed themselves to be directed only by selfish motives.

a. They were going to commit a horrible crime because of a danger to themselves which was only as yet hypothetical. Roman jailers and guards were kept honest by being made responsible for their prisoners—life for life. The jailer at Philippi was agitated when he found the prison doors open, because he knew that the Roman law required that he should surrender his own life in their stead. The same penalty hung over the soldiers who in Paul's ship were escorting prisoners to Rome. Their own lives were at stake in the matter. But they had no right to murder these men whom they were guarding on the mere hypothesis that if they did not do so they would suffer the death penalty themselves; for the ship was

not yet wrecked, some of the prisoners might be drowned if it were wrecked, if any did survive they probably would not have been able to escape. Yet with all these chances of murder being unnecessary, the soldiers had no hesitation in settling upon it.

b. Their selfishness was not hindered by the brutality of their plan. The prisoners were helpless, some of them might be innocent (as Paul was found to be afterward), they were trusting in the fidelity of the soldiers. Yet the soldiers had decided to slay them, as though they were so many burdensome cattle. To be sure the habits of those old times were more brutal than ours, for Christianity has had nineteen hundred years in which to temper the barbarism of Roman civilization. Yet human hearts were the same then as now; and if these Roman soldiers had not been thinking of saving themselves from danger above everything else, their brutality would not have been so utterly inhuman.

c. They were ungrateful, as selfish people always are. For gratitude implies obligation, and that has no meaning to those who recognize no other beings as in existence except themselves. Paul had saved the lives of the soldiers (thus far at least) by preventing the abandonment of the ship by the sailors. The soldiers could not have managed it, and wreck would have been certain but for Paul's discovery of the attempt of the sailors to run away. Beside that, the soldiers as well as all others in the ship were indebted to Paul for his encouragement (v. 34), which had led them to bestir themselves to take such measures as relieved the ship (v. 38). But the soldiers cared nothing for these things. They were as ready to put Paul to death as though he had been a most hateful enemy, instead of one who, cumbered as he was, and threatened

with the same dangers which threatened them, had still done them good. Gratitude played no part in their thinking.

d. Danger hardened them, as it did the sailors. Confronting death, one ought to have the most unselfish, pure, and noble feelings possible. All that is best in the heart ought then to be stirring. Yet how often the exact converse is true—that danger makes men forgetful of all but selfish interests, turns them into cowards, and brutalizes them. Every one of us has known of people who were well thought of until some moment of danger showed how utterly selfish and base they were. And such a revelation is not unfair. It shows the true man, who in more quiet ways has all along been indulging those same evil traits which the crisis of danger has only made plain. Crises come to us all in various ways. If we do not wish them to reveal what we most intensely desire to be concealed, in this quiet time before the test comes we must be eliminating those unlovely elements from our hearts.

II. We turn now to the beautiful and noble story of *the unselfishness of Paul*. The very same circumstances outwardly were at work upon him as upon the soldiers and sailors. The same thing revealed shame in them and glory in him. It is not circumstances that are responsible for the way in which we stand exposed before the eyes of men, but the state of our hearts.

I. The way in which Paul's unselfishness was exhibited.

a. In devotion to others rather than to himself. They thought only of their danger, and he thought only of them. He kept the sailors in the ship and so held fast to any possible chance of guidance into safety. He no-

ticed the weakness of the ship's company through hunger, and led them to eat. He cheered them up by telling them that no one should be lost. This meant something to them, even if they thought he was only guessing; for "they were all of good cheer" in consequence. Paul was always thoughtful for others, even if they were strangers to him, even if they were his enemies. In this he was like his Lord who prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." If one would be a true Christian he must deny self. The positive side of this is thinking for others.

b. Paul's unselfishness was shown in practical ways. It was not Utopian, fanciful, subtly reactive upon self. For sometimes one is unselfish on a low level only to indulge selfish feelings of a high sort. But that is selfishness just the same. Paul's helpfulness was very downright and business-like. He caught the sailors trying to escape in the one boat the ship possessed, under the plea that they "would lay out anchors from the foreship." He said nothing to the officers of the ship (who were doubtless in combination with the sailors or else inefficient and powerless), but appealed to the soldiers, who would have most to lose if the plan of the sailors succeeded (v. 31). The soldiers cast the boat adrift—a satisfactory if radical way of dealing with the difficulty. Again, Paul remembered the prosaic but real value of food even in the midst of infinitely more important matters. This lowly suggestion had in it good sense. It relieved the tense thoughts of these danger-harassed souls. Paul combined in himself the highest emotional idealism with the most business-like common-sense. His unselfishness was not dramatic and spectacular, but practical, and therefore successful. Being unselfish is not romantic, but prosaic and some-

times hard. It is for this reason all the more difficult to live out.

c. Paul encouraged those about him. He ate his bread as quietly as though there were no danger at all threatening, not forgetting his usual habit of thanking God for it (v. 35). His example had a good effect. They all ate. They all caught something of his confidence (even though they could give no reason for it) and they were all of good cheer. A cheerful habit of thinking and acting in ourselves means more to others than any arguments we can offer. A cheerful heart makes others cheerful. And there is more unselfishness in being cheerful sometimes than is guessed.

d. These traits of Paul's unselfishness were brought out by danger. Notice that it was the same danger which brought out only selfishness in soldier and sailor. Again we are reminded that events do not give us our character, they only reveal it; and it is the same whether those events be pleasant or unpleasant. Give a selfish man the good things he asks, and it only makes him more selfish. Take away from an unselfish man the comforts and joys of life, and it only shows the more brightly that same generosity which made him share comforts and joys when he had them. Either kind of fortune, good or bad, serves to bring out what is in us. But misfortune (such as Paul's danger) brings it out most plainly. Therefore, if we are what we ought to be, it ought to be counted joy when we fall into divers temptations.

2. The cause of Paul's unselfishness as thus exhibited.

a. He had faith in God. This worked either way for him, whether he lived or died; God's will in any case would be accomplished, and that was enough for him. But in this particular case he seems to have had an intima-

tion that all on the ship would be saved. And he had faith in God's word to him, however hard of accomplishment it seemed. The waves and the winds now as ever were held in the hollow of the Almighty's hand. Hence it was that he had self-possession enough to think quietly of others' needs and to devise means to answer them. How can a man who is without faith in God be anything but selfish? and how can one who trusts in the Father of loving-kindness be anything but unselfish?

b. The cause of the way in which Paul's unselfishness showed itself was that in him grace and common-sense worked together. He was not a dreamer (though he had his visions): he was a most practical sort of man. And if he had supernatural revelations and empowerments, these did not crush out all that was natural in him, but elevated and supplemented it. Paul used his supernatural endowments as though they were natural. So his unselfishness worked along on every-day levels and was truly efficient.

3. The result of his unselfishness.

a. Bad men were thwarted in their evil designs. The selfish sailors were not permitted to abandon the ship; the selfish soldiers were not permitted to murder their prisoners. Both were due to Paul's unselfishness. The former, because Paul directly prevented it; the latter, because Paul's unselfishness had made an impression upon the centurion so that he interfered (v. 43). It is a part of the result of a good man's good life that it prevents sin as well as encourages to righteousness.

b. Paul himself was saved. He was not thinking of this chiefly. His care was for others, and he was taken care of himself. God always keeps watch of those who are doing his will. He does not let them suffer unless it

be for some end involved in his plan. He does not let danger overwhelm them unless it be for some deliberate purpose. He takes care of those who take care of others. He loves and guards unselfish souls.

c. The whole ship's company were saved (v. 44). Paul's foresight in keeping the crew on board had made such steps possible (v. 40) as led to the stranding of the ship with the least possible danger. God was then (as generally) working through human agencies. And so it is not to deny God's work to say that Paul's unselfishness saved the ship. He had not exerted it so unstintedly for nothing; it had its good results. As Paul looked over the company gathered in safety on the shore, he must have thanked God for that faith which had been the ground of his confidence in escape from danger, and which, by making him forget himself, had made him able to bring blessing to so many. We may parody a famous proverb and say that nothing succeeds like unselfishness.

III. *Final lessons.*

1. Faith in God should be the most vigorous element in our emotional being. It is the centre of all the Christian's life. On it rests his eternal salvation. On it rests his conduct of every day.

2. Let us believe in our safety from accident. We are perfectly safe until God's time for us to die has come. And then we should be unwilling to live.

3. Life is best spent in helping others. A self-centred soul becomes uncentred. We become what is best by giving out of that which is best in us. The way of the cross, which is the way of supreme success, is the way of giving up.

PAUL AT ROME.

ACTS 28:20-31.

WE have seen Paul at Athens, the centre of the world's philosophical life, preaching without any great success the unsearchable wisdom of God in Jesus Christ. We have seen him at Jerusalem, the centre of the world's religious life, proclaiming, under the stress of violent antagonism, the true God's revelation of himself. Now we see him at Rome, the centre of the world's political life, telling, with small success still, of that kingdom whose foundations are infinitely more substantial than the seven hills which upheld Rome the eternal. Representatively Paul had thus preached Christ and him crucified to the whole world.

How striking the very thought of Paul at Rome! We remember her splendor, her power, her self-satisfaction. We stand by the Appian Way (as a great painter has helped us to do) and gaze upon the indolent, bejewelled, debased throng of nobles and slaves hurrying by, and we think how little they knew of the presence, somewhere obscurely in the vast multitude, of that "little wizened Jew" who brought with him thither the news of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, who was the sign that the day of heavenly visitation had come to Rome. To-day there is joy for us in the thought that Paul's name is written not only all over Rome, but all over the civilized world, while the names of those dissolute and proud men are all forgotten. We exult in history's vindication of the feeble. We think of the triumphant Paul. But what would we have thought of him if we had seen him as he

was in Rome, without any of this historical glorification as yet visible? It is so difficult for us to fully comprehend that the gospel's power is wholly spiritual, that it is not effective because of the solidity and grandeur of the church of to-day, or the impressiveness of the historic names connected with it, or the eloquence and mental power of its great advocates, but solely because of its heavenliness, that we can hardly be surprised that Rome did not discover that anything had happened when Paul came within the walls.

One might dream at great length along such lines, and perhaps to advantage; but the prosaic but real details of what occurred at Rome in Paul's visit are before us for our study.

I. We see Paul *preparing the ground* for his work.

1. He began, in his last efforts as in his first, with the Jews. He was one of them and understood them. They were at least part way to Christianity because they believed in the true God. They were God's chosen people, and it was fitting that, in the order of time, the gospel should be offered to them first. What a tremendous burden of responsibility rests upon that ancient people for their attitude towards God and his Christ! If opportunity of knowing could secure it, they ought to be the very leaders of those who are carrying God's truth throughout the world. But in their case, as in every man's, opportunity does not settle destiny, but rather the action of man's will upon opportunity.

2. *Conciliation* characterized Paul's approach to his own nation. He did not know what rumors concerning him might have come across the sea, so he felt it necessary to begin with a personal explanation and defence. Paul was not a scheming sophist who used a shrewd tact

wherever he went simply to gain a hearing, concealing his antecedents and real character. Candor was the very soul of his being. He was skilful in dealing with men, and yet open, even at the risk of life. He was conciliatory towards the Jews everywhere, because he truly felt that they and he had very much permanently in common. He loved them passionately, it is not too much to say. His manner of address to the Jews in Rome was not that of a hired preacher, but that of a misunderstood friend.

3. *Prejudice* at once confronted him. They probably told the truth when they said they had had no communication concerning Paul with the men of Judæa (v. 21). But they knew more probably than they said concerning Christianity. There was a Christian church in Rome of some years' standing. That they had no relations with it shows they were hostile to it. The sneering generality concerning Christianity's ill-repute was more definite in their minds than they cared to have Paul guess. Why should they be so careful in concealing their strong hostility to Christ from Paul, and in conciliating him by their attendance upon his address? It is likely, as Hackett suggests, that at this time, when their relations with the Roman Government were critical, they felt it necessary to avoid any disturbance among themselves, lest they should again get into trouble by being accused of turbulence. Paul was appealing to the emperor from some action of their countrymen at home. It was better that his hostility should be diminished as much as possible before he brought his charges before the throne. Thus their mildness and willingness to listen are explained. But as Meyer says, "However cautious and officially reserved they are, the Jewish contempt of Christianity may be plainly seen."

4. *Hardness of heart* is thus brought to view again as the condition of the Jews before the preaching of Paul. The reason they were not all turned to Christ, advancing from that midway position which they held between no truth and all truth, was not because of any lack in opportunity or cogency of motive to take the step, but solely because they would not. Their hearts were hearts of stone.

II. The first meeting, which Paul had thus tried to use to prepare the way pleasantly for a plain Christian talk, was followed by a second, which Paul used for *the presentation of the gospel*.

1. His *doctrine* is set before them in unmistakable form. He wishes to conciliate them, but he must tell them the plain truth. (a) The kingdom of God is the subject of his testimony. Paul is accused by rationalistic historical reconstructionists (like Pfleiderer) of being the author of "Paulinism," a system of doctrine intended to be supplementary to Christ's teaching, but which really is antagonistic to it. How little real foundation for such a fancy there is, is evident from the theme of Paul's address in Rome. What was it? The very thing which (according to the synoptists) formed the substance of all of Christ's teaching, namely, the kingdom of God. Christ taught about the characteristics of those who belonged to this kingdom, the features of the kingdom itself (spirituality, everlastingness, etc.), the rewards and punishments connected with it, and the way into it. His parables were parables of the kingdom, his miracles were miracles of the kingdom. It is astonishing how much this is overlooked in Christian teaching and preaching to-day. The theme which was oftenest upon the lips of Jesus is seldom upon ours. But it is something that this oversight and failure in

appreciation is being brought to our notice by books bearing upon the kingdom of God, by articles in the press, and by addresses. If the relative emphases in the teaching of Christ are models of how our emphases ought to be arranged, then the kingdom of God should be the chief subject of our thought. (b) Jesus was set forth as the centre of this kingdom in Paul's address (v. 23). To understand it is to understand him, and *vice versa*. Christ is interpreted to us by our study of the meaning of the kingdom of God. And we understand it as we comprehend more and more the meaning of his person, character, and life. But to understand is not an end but a means to an end. The end of thinking concerning the kingdom and the King is to lead us into it and under his dominion. Not to understand about the kingdom, but to be in it, and to abide in it for ever, is the end of preaching. (c) The Scriptures formed the foundation of Paul's argument with these Jews (v. 23). With Greeks Paul did not use the Scriptures, because the days had not yet come when the value of books and the truths contained in them was seen not to be confined to the people in whose tongue they were written. We know now that if there is truth anywhere it concerns us to find it out. The Hebrew Bible has meaning to us, and the argument from prophecy (much neglected) ought to have meaning to us. This could not be expected in Greek or Roman, both of whom believed that truth was parcelled out somehow linguistically. But to a Jew naturally the argument from prophecy was powerful. And it was meant to be so plainly by the Scriptures themselves. Why not also to us? Why should not the argument for Christ have cogency to-day to minds of modern temper? We have not generally penetrated into the meaning of Christ's fulfilment of prophecy

which lies back of temporal correspondence. Prophecy is more than foretelling. The man who would make the argument from prophecy universally cogent (as it is cogent to a Jew) would do us a service.

2. The *reception* of Paul's address is chronicled (vv. 23, 24). (a) There was interest evidently, for they stayed to listen "from morning to evening." The motive which induced them to come may have been far from religious, as we have seen, but once they were there listening to one so well versed in their own national lore, so powerful in using it argumentatively for Jesus Christ, they were held to hear longer very likely than they would have desired. Often those who come to scoff have gone away to pray. The spiritually dead man goes to some Salvation Army meeting perhaps to gratify curiosity, and finds himself departing soberly with a ringing conscience. (b) The gospel now as always acted in two ways—it was a savor of life or a savor of death. "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved" (v. 24). The magnet draws or it does not draw. There is no third possibility. Everywhere, as the gospel moves around the world, it is the touchstone of human hearts, affecting them always in one of two ways. That is what God has meant it to do, and what it does, even for those who try to stand on some middle ground of non-committal. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

3. Paul's *warning* (vv. 26, 27). They all departed. The gospel had not conquered them as a company, though some believed. Paul makes one more attempt to reach them as they go, using the words of their well-known Scriptures. (a) These were words for them to remember. They were of such a striking and paradoxical character that attention would be drawn to them even in

a casual reader. They were supposed to be wholly inapplicable to the Jews. So these Jews, hearing them uttered by Paul as his closing message to them, would be piqued into asking, "Why did he use these words, meant for Gentiles, with reference to us?" Perhaps their curiosity might be sufficiently excited to lead them to the truth.

(b) These were harsh words. Paul had reasoned quietly and in a conciliatory way, without success, humanly speaking. Severity remained to him and he employed it. Yet it was not the severity of personal disappointment or anger, but the loving severity of God to his own people. Paul seems to say to them in effect, "You believe in prophecy. Here is a prophecy which I leave with you urging you to find out the meaning." Then he repeats the famous passage concerning God's judicial blinding of the hearts of his people as a punishment for their wilful self-blinding towards him. These words of judgment were uttered before the judgment fell, to deter the people, if possible, from making it necessary. Harsh as they were, they were really beneficent. So Paul wished they might be to his Jewish auditors. It is no kindness to withhold from men the knowledge of the penalty of unbelief.

(c) Paul warns the Jews that God will pass them by and give his salvation to the Gentiles if they do not accept it (v. 29). The meaning is not that God would save only one or the other, but not both. God meant to save Jews first, and then Gentiles through the Jews. But if the Jews refused, then he would save the Gentiles directly, and they would have the honor (which belonged to the Jews) of being the immediate recipients in history of the divine revelation of salvation. And then, the tables being completely turned, the Gentiles should bring the news of salvation to the Jews. (See Rom. 11: 23, 25, 26.) Paul's

warning to the Jews is that by not receiving Christ then, when they did receive him as a nation it would be, so to say, at second hand. Thus they would have lost the great privilege kept for them in history by God. And back of this warning also lay the deeper individualistic warning that for every one (Jew and Gentile alike) who refused to accept Jesus Christ, salvation was impossible.

III. *Paul's life at Rome* is described.

1. He had (a) a considerable amount of freedom (v. 30). At first he was doubtless with his friends. Then he had "his own hired dwelling." But always of course there was a guard with him. He was a prisoner no doubt, but yet able to accomplish all the plans he had in mind.

(b As a result he was enabled to teach "with all boldness" (v. 31). This was one of the very few occasions in Paul's ministry where none forbade him (v. 31) to teach Jesus Christ. The Romans cared nothing about it. The Jews dared not raise their usual tumult for fear of bringing Roman magisterial displeasure upon themselves as seditious. Paul took advantage of these circumstances in favor of Christ. Paul was restricted by circumstances like the rest of men. But his zeal was always at high pressure and escaped in activity exactly according to the yielding of circumstances. All opportunities, in other words, were used to the full.

2. Misfortune was thus turned into good fortune (see Phil. 1:12-18). (a) Paul's arrest in Jerusalem had opened Rome to him. His imprisonment gave him security. All things were working together for good: the wrath of man was made to praise God, and "in every way Christ was proclaimed." Since the preaching of the cross was the chief aim in Paul's activity, we cannot wonder that he rejoiced in his bonds, which opened to him a

territory for evangelization which would have been closed without them. (b) The substance of his doctrine remained still the same: the kingdom of God, and Christ as the way into it (v. 31). In his preaching as in his life Paul kept close by his Saviour.

IV. We have here *the conclusion of the book of Acts*. It has sometimes been called abrupt. But the last sentence is flowing and complete. It is a rounded period intended to close the book. And yet the end of Paul's Roman experience and the end of his life are not described. But (a) the gospel is shown to have been preached apostolically from Jerusalem to Rome. Representatively the whole world had been evangelized. The type was complete of the actual proclamation of the cross to all the nations. This is the object of the Acts. The book is not a life of Paul. (b) The cause is everything, the instrument is nothing. Rome hears about Jesus Christ—Rome the proud capital of the world. No matter about Paul.

V. *Closing thoughts.*

1. The kingdom is infinitely greater than any who serve it. The message is more than the messenger. Let us lift up the cross and hide ourselves.

2. The gospel is world-conquering. Rome hears and heeds not. But she shall heed yet. Kings shall come with their gifts, and nations shall flock to the throne of the triumphant Christ.

3. Blessed are all those who, with Paul, have a share, however humble, in spreading the kingdom of God. Is life worth living? A thousand times yes, when spent in this glorious service.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

ROMANS I:8-17.

PAUL believed in thoroughness. He would have subscribed instantly to the maxim "Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well." While at Gamaliel's school he shirked none of his lessons. When engaged at his trade he did good, honest work. It was enough to say of a tent in the market, "Saul of Tarsus made it." So long as he was a Jew he was a thorough Jew, "one of the strictest sect," a zealot, an inquisitor breathing out slaughter against those who differed with him. When he became a Christian he was a thorough Christian, shrinking from no hardship, ready to meet every duty and responsibility.

He began his ministry with three years of preparation in the Arabian desert. This was his "seminary course." There was no hurry. He must settle his convictions, get a thorough furnishing, bide God's time, and await orders. When the orders came he replied, "I am ready," and thereafter he held himself ever in readiness for anything that the Master might require of him. He was ready to go with the gospel to his old home at Tarsus, ready to visit the towns of Asia Minor, ready to cross over into Europe—"ready to go to Rome also," though going to Rome meant bearding the lion in his den. All this because he had settled convictions. He knew whom he believed, reckoned that any sufferings which might befall him were not worthy to be compared with the ultimate glory, and was persuaded that nothing here or hereafter

could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord.

The fact is, when Paul came out of those solitudes of Arabia he was something of a fanatic in the world's esteem. He had confronted God in the lonely wastes; had made himself familiar, face to face and eye to eye, with the great verities and solemnities of the spiritual world. Thenceforth he was of moral necessity a man of one idea—namely, to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. "I am determined," he said, "to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified." And again, "I count all things but loss that I may win Christ." And again, "This one thing I do: forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

I. *Here is his boast: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."* Loud vaunting, this; and particularly in an age when loyalty to the Gospel meant exposure to axe and fagot and beasts of the amphitheatre. But Paul was no vainglorious braggart. He was able to vindicate his words; he did vindicate them splendidly again and again. Observe how he did it.

(1) He proved that he was not ashamed of the Gospel *by the fact that he accepted it heartily and gave up everything for it.* Everything! He "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." The word rendered "loss" has reference to portions of a cargo thrown over in stress of storm. For the sake of the Gospel he had thrown over his pride of birth; for was he not "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews?" For the sake of the Gospel he had thrown over his pride of learning; he

was familiar with the wisdom of the schools, but after his conversion he accounted that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." For the Gospel's sake he had thrown over whatever of competency he had by inheritance and social patronage, and had resumed the trade of tent-making that he might be beholden to nobody while dispensing the riches of the heavenly grace. For the Gospel's sake he had thrown over his proud position as a rabbi and Sanhedrist. In all Israel there had been no youth with a brighter outlook than he. Now he was ostracized, looked down upon, persecuted. But all this he accepted with equanimity, nay with joyful pride, knowing that his new possession was worth a thousand-fold what he had sacrificed for it.

A man's religion is usually worth what it costs him. A nugget of gold may bring a few dollars more or less in the market; but if its owner tells you that it represents a toilsome journey to the gold fields, a journey made at peril of life with hunger and thirst and privations innumerable, you will understand when he adds, "money could not buy it."

This is the touchstone of value in spiritual things: What has your religion cost you? Paul could never have given up so much for a Gospel that was not inestimably dear to him. And having paid so much for his religion he could not possibly be ashamed of it. Cheap things are likely to be treated with small consideration. If Christ and his salvation are worth anything they are worth everything to us.

(2) Paul, furthermore, proved that he was not ashamed of the Gospel *by the fact that he delighted to preach it*. "Necessity is upon me," he exclaimed, "woe is me if I preach not the Gospel."

He was an unwearying missionary. Soon after his return from Arabia he betook himself to Tarsus with the purpose of declaring the Gospel to his former friends and fellow-townsmen. In the fashionable city of Corinth he preached it "from house to house." At Philippi he began with a sermon to a company of women by the riverside, kept up his work in spite of persecution and desisted only when the scourge compelled him. The city of Great Diana was stirred to its centre by his fearless eloquence. At Jerusalem he was followed by a howling mob to the steps of the Castle of Antonia, from which he told the story of his conversion in burning words. In the judgment hall at Cæsarea he reasoned so mightily of righteousness and judgment to come that his royal auditors trembled and were glad to be rid of him. On his way to be tried in the Imperial City, when the ship was driving through the hissing seas, sails torn and masts shattered, he delivered his message to the accompaniment of fierce Euraquilo. In the Mamertine prison at Rome, earnest as ever, he did not forbear to exhort his guards and declare the truth to such as were permitted to visit him, insomuch that he "begat many children in his chains."

Ashamed of the Gospel! Oh, no. He gloried in it. He took every opportunity of declaring it; and where opportunities fell short he made them. Weak-kneed and tongue-tied Christians there may be, who

"Like peasant foot-boys do aye keep the walls
And dare not take up arms like gentlemen,"

but Paul was not one of them. *Christianus sum* was his boast. He was ever "ready;" he was never "ashamed." By the example of this holy apostle let us all be moved to more unflinching valor. Here is our song:

"I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Or to defend his cause,
Maintain the honor of his word,
The glory of his cross."

(3) But Paul still further justified his words "I am not ashamed of the Gospel" *by the manner in which he exemplified its precepts in his daily life*. At the bottom of his life there were three fundamental principles. The first of these was *conformity to Christ*. His idea of predestination is expressed in the words "whom God foreknew them he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son;" Rom. 8: 29. This he believed to be the summit of character and the objective point of the Christian life. "We all," he says, "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord;" 2 Cor. 3: 18. The second of Paul's guiding principles was *the authority of conscience*. Law, duty, obedience were sacred words to him. He began his Christian life with "What wilt thou have me to do?" and ended it with "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." To the Corinthians he wrote "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world;" 2 Cor. 1: 12. And the third of Paul's controlling principles was *benevolence*. He felt himself to be every man's debtor for Jesus' sake. And the purpose of his life was to discharge this debt by presenting to every man the Gospel of the grace of God. In his letter to the Romans he makes this solemn asseveration: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have

great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart; for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kindred according to the flesh." Rom. 9: 1-3.

It is said of Michael Angelo that when he painted he wore a candle over the visor of his cap to prevent his own shadow from falling on the canvas. Christ was the light by which Paul lived and wrought; and this light so shone into his life and through it as to shut selfishness out of it.

(4) Further still, Paul showed that he was not ashamed of the Gospel *by his willingness to die for it*.

During the Neronian persecution, in which the frenzied tyrant exhausted his infernal ingenuity in devising tortures, Paul—so tradition says—ventured into Rome to comfort the disciples of Christ in their extremity. He was arrested and cast into prison. It was then that he wrote that inspiring letter to Timothy in which he protests that he is "now ready to be offered." He had not long to wait. One day, unnoted in history, he was led forth to the place of execution. His eyes being blindfolded he was ordered to lay his head upon the block. He paused a moment, lifted his hands saying, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," and then obeyed. There was the flash of a sword—and "Paul the aged" had given the last and best vindication of his boast, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

Ah, if our eyes could have followed the soul that mounted from that feeble and maimed body to the skies! What songs of welcome! What greetings! And best of all one voice, the voice of the Master saying, "Thou wast not ashamed of me; wherefore in the presence of my Father and the angels, Paul, I acknowledge thee!"

II. We have heard Paul's boast and have marked how

he justified it. But *we have yet to learn his reasons for making it.* "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," he says, "*for* it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The word "*for*" introduces us to the *rationale* of his courage.

(1) *The Gospel is power.* Paul was writing to a people who revered power. The name of their empire, *Roma*, meant power. The father of their gods was Jupiter Tonans, the irresistible. They bowed in worship before the known forces of nature.

We are all similarly moved. We want an omnipotent God—a God that answereth by fire—an invulnerable creed, a sanctuary that can stand untrembling amidst the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds. The Gospel abides the test. Of all religions Christianity alone has resisted the assaults of time. It is venerable but not antiquated. Science has confirmed it. Philosophy has corroborated it. It illustrates in its own history its glorious doctrine of the endless life.

(2) *The Gospel is the power of God.* The thought of power is greatly relieved by the mention of that name in connection with it. The central figure of the Gospel is Jesus Christ whose other name is "The Arm of the Lord." This Arm is made bare for the deliverance of souls from sin; as it is written, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the Arm of the Lord revealed?" The figure is that of a workman rolling back his sleeve when about to undertake a difficult task. Thus is the Gospel strikingly set forth as a manifestation of divine power in behalf of a lost and ruined world.

(3) *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.* It does a great many other things, incidentally, but salvation is its master stroke.

The test of any power is in its application. We shall be ready to believe in the "Keeley motor" when we can break it to harness or use it with running gear. So the ultimate proof of the value of the Gospel is in what it can do. What can it do? It can save an immortal soul. It proposes to save; and it does save. "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

Salvation is a large word. It means more than deliverance from the fire unquenchable and the worm that dieth not. It means rescue from sin—from the bondage of it; for sin is worse than hell, since it involves it. It means upbuilding in righteousness, reformation, character, holy life. It means promotion to the work of the kingdom of God; the honor of participation in that great spiritual enterprise which is being carried on under the supervision and control of the Holy Ghost, with the final purpose of bringing the world back to truth and righteousness.

Whether or no we enter into this salvation depends on our attitude towards Christ. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation "*to every one that believeth.*" Faith makes us partakers of the heavenly grace. By faith we clasp hands with the only-begotten Son of God in his mighty work of redemption. In accepting his Gospel we fall in with the multitude who are carrying on the great reforms, tearing down strongholds of iniquity, giving the light to those who lie in darkness and the shadow of death, making the waste places rejoice and blossom as the rose, and doing their utmost in every way to hasten the appearing of the Lord when his glory shall cover the earth as the waters cover the deep.

Ashamed of this Gospel? A thousand times no! Let

us rather glory in it and pray God that we may know more and more of it. For it is the one thing on earth that brings heaven near and makes life sweet. It is the Arm of the Father, made bare and reached down out of heaven to pluck us out of danger and place us within reach of blessings unutterable and full of glory.

REDEMPTION IN CHRIST.

ROMANS 3: 19-26..

WE must all appear before the judgment bar of God. On the sentence there to be passed upon us will depend our eternal weal or woe. The criterion of judgment will be merit or righteousness. There will be no partiality, no favor or disfavor, no deviation from the rule appointed. The soul that is defiled with sin shall die; and conversely the soul that is found clothed in spotless righteousness shall live in endless felicity. Everything will turn on merit or—as it is here called—righteousness. This is the teaching of the Bible; but if there were no Bible it would still be an accepted truth; for it rests not more distinctly on Revelation than on philosophy and common sense. The Buddhist doctrine known as *Karma* or consequences is found in one form or another in every religion on earth. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.

“The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience he stands waiting,
With exactness grinds he all.”

There is no escaping the edict: Life for righteousness, Death for sin.

It is for this reason that men everywhere and in all ages have been concerned about merit.

In response to Bildad's argument on exact retribution, Job said with an accent of despair, “I know it is so of a truth; *but how should man be just before God?*” In other words, What hope is there, in view of the inflexible rule of judgment, for a man whose soul is polluted with

sin? How shall he so clothe himself as to appear worthily at the great assize? Where shall he find the necessary merit, the righteousness that shall be as a wedding garment in the great day?

The Hindu who measures his length along the earth in a weary journey to the Ganges in seeking thereby to make merit. The Confucianist burning incense before the memorial tablets of his ancestors is hoping thus to lay up an accumulation of merit or righteousness against the coming day of judgment. The Pharisee who makes long prayers and pays tithe of his garden herbs is doing the same thing. So is the nun who counts the beads in her rosary. So is the moralist who prides himself on his integrity and benevolence. The instinct is universal; we are all trying to make merit; all alike endeavoring to weave a robe of righteousness for the day when we must appear before God.

Alas, if any of us should make a mistake! Alas, if our wedding garment should prove at the last to be a covering of mere shreds and tatters! To avert this danger the apostle writes the admonition before us. He tells us distinctly that there are two kinds of righteousness: the one spurious and deceptive, the other as spotless as the fine linen of the angels. In chapter ten of the same Epistle he marks the difference with great clearness: "*I bear them record,*" he says in reference to his Jewish brethren, "*that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which*

doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise: Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above,) or Who shall descend into the deep? (that is to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach, to wit, If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Returning now to the passage before us let us observe the line which the apostle draws between the Righteousness which is of the law and the Righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ.

I. *The Righteousness of the Law.* In this there is no possibility of salvation. The statement is made distinctly, "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." The best sinner that ever lived deserved death under the law; and unless he acquired the necessary merit in some other way the sentence of death has been passed upon him.

What then is the function of law? (1) If man had never sinned he would be justified by it. The law has in it the promise of life for such as keep it, but not for such as break it. (2) In the case of sinners it serves as a detective, exposing their shortcomings and transgressions. Where there is no law of Scripture or conscience there can be no imputation of sin. By the law cometh the knowledge of sin. By the law all our alleged righteousnesses are made to appear as filthy rags. (3) It serves, furthermore, as a jailer. It is written in Galatians 3:22,

"The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." The word "concluded" means literally *imprisoned*. The law shuts up the sinner as in a dungeon to await his trial. It makes escape impossible save in the one way which we are presently to consider. (4) It serves still further as a prosecutor. "We know that what things soever the law saith it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God." Guilty! We are standing before the judgment bar of the Most High. Time was when we flattered ourselves that we were possessed of personal merit. We thought that when the supreme moment should be at hand we might appear in fine linen white and clean; but the law speaks and our hearts sink within us. It urges its demand of perfect obedience; saying, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. 3:10. It insists that guilt resides not in the multiplicity of sin only, but in the very nature of it: "For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all;" James 2:10. It declares that, inasmuch as each moment has its own full measure of responsibility, if a man has sinned but once no subsequent obedience can atone for it. It calls up the mislived past—the awful unatoned-for past. It presents an appalling indictment—sins innumerable, sins of omission and commission, sins of thought, word, and deed—and we drop our eyes in utter shame and despair. Our white linen is naught but filthy rags. We are guilty, guilty under the law and before God. (5) But for such as are willing, the law serves also as a schoolmaster, "to bring us unto Christ that we may be justified by faith;" Gal. 3:24,

The "pedagogue" here referred to was a servant employed to lead the pupil to school. Thus the law, by exposing our sins and the inadequacy of our personal merit, leads us to the great Master who can instruct us in true righteousness and the way of everlasting life.

II. We now turn to the other form of Righteousness—the *Righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.*

At this point we touch the centre of our Christian religion, the doctrine of Justification by Faith, which Luther rightly called "the article of a standing or falling church." If the righteousness of the law is sufficient for salvation then there is no value in our theological system. As Paul says to the Galatians, "We have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified;" and, further on, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law then Christ is dead in vain;" Gal. 2: 15-31.

This righteousness of God is called a "righteousness without the law" and is said to be "witnessed by the law and the prophets," that is, by the Scriptures. The divine Word is full of it from the protevangel in Eden to the last benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." Thus Scripture is its witness; and no man can believe in Scripture or frankly receive it as his rule of faith and practice without a cordial acquiescence in this doctrine of the righteousness which is by faith in Jesus Christ. From the testimony of Scripture here as elsewhere we reach the following conclusions: *First.* All men are sinners. "For there is no difference; all have

sinned and come short of the glory of God." *Second.* Deliverance has been provided "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The cross of Jesus is the solution of our difficulty. He bare our sins in his own body on the tree. He took our place under the law, and was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, that by his stripes we might be healed. He paid our penalty and so made it possible for God to save us consistently with justice. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh"—that is, through the infirmity of our human nature—"God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." Rom. 8:3. The self-sacrifice of Jesus in our behalf was in the nature of a propitiation for our sins. "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree," Gal. 3:13. If we are ever saved from death, therefore, it will not be on account of personal sinlessness but because of the vicarious suffering of Jesus Christ. What we deserved he bore in our behalf; as it is written, "He descended into hell" for us. *Third.* The benefits of the death of Jesus Christ are appropriated by faith. He is "set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." The righteousness of grace is offered to all; but it is "upon all them that believe." All men are made salvable by the atonement which God has provided, "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" but only such are saved as are willing to receive it. So it is written, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," Rom. 10:4. Water is free: but a man who refuses to drink may stand by the river-

side and perish of thirst. God's grace in the atonement is like a rope thrown to a drowning swimmer; he lives if he grasps it.

In the provision which God has made for our redemption, not through our vain righteousness but through the righteousness of grace, he has preëminently "declared his own righteousness"—that is, his loyalty to truth and justice—"that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." No law nor principle of justice is violated in the salvation of the sinner through the propitiation of the cross. In this exhibition of divine wisdom and power, "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." And here at length an answer is found to the patriarch's despairing cry, "But how shall man be just before God?"

Thus clearly does the apostle distinguish between the two righteousnesses; that which is under the law and that which is of grace. It is for every man to say for himself whether he will trust to his personal merit or to Christ's atonement for his vindication in the great day. If any man perish it must be by his own perverseness. We shall all presently appear in judgment before God—in what apparel? In our own righteousness, that which is of the law? Then disappointment awaits us; we shall seem in our rags like beggars in the palace of the king. Or in the imputed righteousness of Jesus, the spotless garment woven for us by the pierced hands of the Saviour? Then shall his grace reign through his righteousness unto our eternal life.

"Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Mid flaming worlds in these arrayed
With joy shall I lift up my head."

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

ROM. 5:1-11.

ALL Scripture is profitable, but some portions are more profitable than others and are like mines of hid treasure. If the story of the "Fifth of Romans" could be told, it would embrace the conversion of an innumerable multitude. It is like the scone stone of the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey on which the sovereigns of England have been crowned for a thousand years and more. This glorious truth of reconciliation through Christ has exalted many sinners to be kings and priests unto God. In one of Dr. James Hamilton's letters he speaks of a visit which he once made to a county almshouse. "It was," he says, "a windy afternoon. There sat before a feeble fire a very aged man who, the better to keep from his bald head the cold gusts, wore his bonnet, though never again likely to need it out of doors. He was deaf, and so shaken with the palsy that one of his wooden shoes was constantly clattering on the hearth. But, deaf and sick and helpless as he was, his heart was quite content.

" 'What are you doing, Wiseby?' said I.

" 'Waiting, sir.'

" 'And what for?'

" 'For the appearing of my Lord.'

" 'And why do you wish for his appearing?'

" 'Oh, sir, because I expect great things when he comes. He has promised a crown of righteousness to all who love his appearing.'

" Then I asked him the foundation of his hope. By

degrees he adjusted his heavy bowed glasses and opening the great Bible beside him pointed to the place where it is written, 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' "

"Therefore" at the outset is a significant opening. It points back to the apostle's argument with respect to justification by faith, the great doctrine of the Reformation and of the universal evangelical church of Jesus Christ. Luther, when a monk, visited Rome to see the pomp and circumstance of worship there. He was horrified by what he saw; "*Pompa diaboli*," he called it. He perceived that there must be something better in true religion. As he climbed the *Sancta Scala* on bended knee it flashed upon him in an instant, "The just shall live by faith." Those who, following Luther, held to this great doctrine were called in derision "Solifidians," i. e., believers in the virtue of faith alone, or, in one word, faith-only-ans. The name is now obsolete, but the children of those who wore it have become an exceeding great multitude whom no man can number. These are the people to whom the apostle refers when he says, "We, being justified by faith." The inventory here given of the things which they possess through Jesus Christ shows them to be incalculably rich towards God.

I. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The early fathers were wont to speak of three spiritual states, the state of Sin, the state of Grace, and the state of Glory. The first result of justification by faith is a deliverance from the state of Sin.

We are at war with God. Sin is the occasion of the awful controversy between us and our Creator. It is said

that the warlike Alani had no god but a naked scimitar thrust into the earth in the midst of the camp. The natural man is in like manner devoted to conflict with his Maker. The carnal mind is enmity against God. This is a veritable variance. On our side there is rebellion; on God's side there is just indignation. If there is ever to be peace, it must be by mutual reconciliation. The bitterness must be taken out of human hearts and the divine anger must be appeased. This is done by the Mediator, Christ, who is the God-man. On the cross Christ, with his hands outstretched, brings God and man to an at-one-ment. Thus is the reconciliation secured. He places our hand in the hand of an offended Jehovah and brings about a blessed peace.

The Duke of Wellington said, "In every battle there is one pivotal moment which determines the issue." Our spiritual conflict terminated at Golgotha where Christ, who is the great Champion of God upon one side and of humanity on the other, went out single-handed against the Prince of Darkness. Six mortal hours he strove, and then returned victorious with the keys of death and hell at his girdle. It was our battle that he fought; it was God's battle too; and by overcoming our common enemy he brought about a mutual reconciliation.

The result is peace, with honor. Any other reconciliation than that at Golgotha is but a patched-up truce. In bearing our sins in his own body on the tree he satisfied justice, magnified the law, made all men salvable, and saved all who for evermore would believe in him. On the cross our Lord Jesus Christ took a great multitude of prisoners of hope, and every one of them he delivered out of bondage and brought into the glorious liberty of the kingdom of God.

II. We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.

The state of Grace wherein we now stand is a whole world of comfort. Grace is God's goodness to the undeserving. We live daily in the experience of the undeserved goodness of our God. What is there worth the having here?

(1.) There is conflict in this state of grace. Not conflict with God, for with him the Solifidians have peace for evermore. But they are at conflict with their lower selves, as the apostle said, "What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." They are busied all the while in fighting the sins of their carnal nature. Nor will this conflict cease until they pass through the gates of the heavenly city.

(2.) But with this conflict they have the confident assurance of pardon. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "No man," said he, "shall pluck them out of my hand."

"I left it all with Jesus long ago;
All my sins I brought him and my woe.
When by faith I saw him on the tree,
Heard his still small whisper, 'T is for thee,'
From my heart the burden rolled away. Happy day!"

(3.) We have fellowship one with another in the kingdom of God. The Church, Ecclesia, is a great and goodly fellowship, and all we who are justified by faith have part in it. Plutarch says that the secret of Rome's power lay in the fact that her captives were not slain nor enslaved nor humiliated in any way, but incorporated into the body politic and made partakers of civic privileges. So is it with those who are subjugated to truth and holiness by the power of Christ. They are made prisoners of hope,

identified with the universal fellowship of believers, made partakers in the work of building up the kingdom of righteousness, and enfranchised every way with all the glorious liberties of the children of God.

III. The state of Glory. And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Observe that, being in the state of grace, our interest in glory is, through anticipation, a mere foretaste.

On the great Day of Atonement the High Priest had access into the "Holiest of All," but even there he saw not the Glory. The luminous cloud that hovered above the Ark of the Covenant was but an adumbration of the glory of God. We who are justified by faith are received into the "Holiest of All" by a new and living way; but God's glory is merely our hope as yet.

Our eyes are not strong enough to bear it; we can only see as in a glass darkly. So splendid were the adornments of the great Temple of Diana at Ephesus that on the outer archway was inscribed, "Look to your eyes." How, think you, could a mortal bear the sudden burst of glory from the ineffable throne? But one day our sight will be so clarified and spiritualized that we may gaze untroubled and undazzled upon it. Now we speak in parables of pearly gates and golden streets, of a pure white throne, and of wingéd multitudes; but these are only dim pictures of things unspeakable by mortal tongue, invisible to mortal eyes, and unimaginable by the mind of man. In that day, however, we shall know even as we are known; we shall see face to face and eye to eye.

Now and then a saint in the borderland, just as he passes out of time into eternity, catches a glimpse of these unspeakable things. Thomas Aquinas left off writing his "*Summa Theologiæ*" to attend a sacrament, and while

here was so filled with rapture that he could never be persuaded to resume his poor disquisition on heavenly things, so far had his earlier thoughts fallen short of the reality which then came to him. There are saints who in their last hour send back a word, a rhapsody, a cry of delight, and vanish.

“The world recedes, it disappears,
And heaven opens on mine eyes.
Mine ears with sounds seraphic ring!
Lend, lend your wings! I mount! I fly!
O grave, where is thy victory!
O death, where is thy sting!”

But who shall tell what are the surprises of the next moment? Oh if we could only follow them to see what they see, and hear what they hear, when they pass through the gates into the city! But we who as yet are in the state of grace can only hope for this glory. Blessed be God, we can hope for it. This is our life, our sweet content, our hidden manna, the hope of the glory of God. “John Knox, hast thou hope?” asked an attendant when the eyes of the reformer were filmed in death. He could no longer speak, but slowly he raised his hand and pointed towards the skies.

IV. One thing more. The apostle refers to it in those expressive words “not only so.” “Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also.” He was writing to the Christians at Rome. He perceived with prophetic foresight that very soon the storm of persecution would break upon them. It was but four years later, in 64 A. D., when Nero unsheathed his sword; the followers of Jesus died under his axe, were ground as God’s fine wheat by the teeth of lions, were sawn asunder, flayed alive, and burned as living torches in the Emperor’s gardens.

Paul foresaw what they would need. He knew that they would need all the consolations of the gospel in the coming dark days. He would fortify them against their tribulations.

The sword is sheathed, the instruments of torture are put away, the lions roar no more in the amphitheatre. Yet we have our trials, and we need the strength of our religion that we may bear up under them. The great dramatist said :

“ Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in its head.”

The apostle puts it better : “ No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” What is it all for ? For the building up of character. “ We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, approval ; and approval, hope ; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

What is it that weighs upon you, friend ? Is it physical pain ? If so, let me commend to you the word of Edward Payson, who said in his anguish, “ God has laid me on my back to teach me to look up.” Is it loss of worldly goods ? Let me remind you how brief our tenure is of the handful of yellow dust and how precious and enduring the treasure is that can be laid up in bags that wax not old, by which we are enriched towards God. Is it bereavement ? Alas ! alas ! there is no sweetening the bitterness of the separation, and yet heaven is made a brighter place and more homelike by the rending of these golden

cords that bind us to the earth. And let me remind you that our blessed religion gives us hope of a "hame-bringing."

These are the things which come to us through justification by faith—a blessed inventory of spiritual possessions. I pray you, beloved, think on these things. Delight your hearts by gazing out upon these possessions. We are still in a state of grace, but we are hastening on to glory. Now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Pain, trouble, bereavement, what matter? Our life is but a handbreadth, eternity is for ever. Great as our possessions are in this present life, we shall have infinitely more. These are the assurances. If there were no heaven, yet would the Christian life be ten thousand times worth the living; but our inventory takes in heaven as well. All things are ours if only the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. We are blended with God. It is the realization of the parable of the Vine and the branches. Faith makes Christ and the believer one. His life is our life, his sorrow our sorrow, his pain in redemption our pain for the deliverance of the race, his life and immortality ours because we rise with him out of the sepulchre, his destiny ours, for we shall sit together with him on his throne. Thus if we are Christ's, all things are ours. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world, or life or death, or things present or things to come, all are ours and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

CHRISTIAN LIVING.

ROMANS 12:1-15.

PAUL turns to ethics. He has been leading us along the narrow and sometimes steep and difficult paths of doctrine—eleven chapters of theology—wonderful truths, profound, inestimably important, bewildering. Not many teachers could have come so far with so little stumbling or led their pupils so safely and satisfactorily. We marvel at Paul's philosophic insight and dialectic skill; yet even he could only touch the outer edges of the great verities, and must needs conclude his lucubrations with a confession of ignorance. The divine nature and character, "free-will, fixed fate, foreknowledge absolute;" the incarnation, justification by faith, assurance, retribution, the endless life—these are some of the sublimities and profundities which have engaged his thought. We have marked him passing along from truth to truth with ever new surprise, like one pursuing his way in Golconda and gathering here and there a precious stone, until on a sudden he reaches the mine itself, walled and garnished with treasure like a vast orb of burning light. So Paul comes at length in his doctrinal quest upon the Covenant of Grace—Free Grace—whereat he pauses with a cry of wonder, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given unto Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him and through

him and to him are all things ; to whom be glory for ever and ever !”

Then he turns to ethics, to a consideration of the practical affairs of life. The word “therefore” marks the transition: “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, that ye present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.”

I. *Thus the Christian life begins. Its first act is surrender, a giving up to God.* The word “body” is used inclusively, as when we say “anybody” or “everybody.” It means the entire self—body, soul, and spirit. The figure of sacrifice is borrowed from the great Day of Atonement, when a living victim, without spot or blemish, was brought to the altar. So, says the apostle, must ye bring yourselves, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

There is no other door of entrance into Christian living. The Master himself said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.” The fathers were wont to make three steps to heaven, namely,

“Out of self,
Unto Christ,
Into glory.”

Neither Christ nor glory can be won until self is presented as a sacrifice, living and holy, and therefore acceptable unto God.

This is here represented as a “reasonable service.” Nothing is required of us which is not reasonable. The religion of Jesus is preëminently a reasonable one. We are not dealt with as creatures of instinct or impulse. He draws us “with the bands of a man.” (Hos. 11:4.) He recognizes the fact that we are rational beings, made

in his own likeness, with minds and consciences and hearts; wherefore he says, "Come now, let us reason together." So, in the present instance, the act of self-surrender is urged upon us as a reasonable thing. Why is it so? *First*, because it is right. A right thing is always reasonable. Conscience tells us that we belong to God by right of creation, and by right of purchase as well: "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19), not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18). His by creation and his by purchase, he has manifestly a property right in us. Honest men pay their honest debts. Wherefore we ought straightway to give ourselves up to God. *Second*, it is reasonable because it is prudent. Safety lies that way. A man cannot rob God of his just possession without jeopardizing his own interests. For the Lord our God is a jealous God. Our talents are trust funds; to use them without reference to their owner is in the nature of embezzlement. The punishment set for such misappropriation of God's property is outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is far better, looked at from the standpoint of self-interest, to allow God to have his own. *And third*, it is reasonable because it is the suggestion of manly gratitude. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present yourselves unto him." His mercies are innumerable; his gracious thoughts to usward are more in number than the sand. He lulled us to sleep last night, held us in his arms and watched over us more tenderly than any mother over an ailing child. He awoke us in the morning and led us forth with a promise of strength and wisdom to meet the duties of another day. We live and move and have our being in him. We

breathe his air, eat at his table, and wear the clothing which he provides for us. A man who would receive such favors from an earthly friend without a sense of profound obligation and utter indebtedness would be regarded as a despicable ingrate. The least that we can do in return for God's loving-kindness and tender mercies is to give ourselves to him, to love, honor, and serve him.

II. *Then comes transformation* : as it is written, "And be not conformed to this world ; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

At the instant of surrender to God the soul passes through a metamorphosis more wonderful than any that Ovid ever dreamed of. The whole nature is renewed. The heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh ; the conscience that was warped and seared is made responsive to the divine call ; the mind that was filled with vain imaginations is open to truth ; and the will that ran like a crooked path hither and yon is straightened and made parallel with the purpose of God. The man is a new creature in Christ Jesus. Tastes, habits, aspirations, conceptions of truth and duty, ambitions for time and eternity, all are reconstructed and adjusted to a new order of things. This is sometimes called regeneration ; here it is called transformation. It is set forth as an uplifting and glorifying, a bringing of the whole man into divine conformity. We are exhorted to attain unto it as men delve into the earth and scale the mountains for immense wealth : "Be ye transformed—be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind—that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

It is obvious that such a transformation can permit no "conformity to the world." The two are antipodal. If

we have presented ourselves to God as a living sacrifice and are wholly renewed by his Spirit, it ought to go without saying that the flesh-pots of Egypt are nothing to us. Yet here is our besetting sin. Nay, rather, let us say that all our besetting sins are rolled into one, to wit, *conformity*. We turn oftentimes to the world for our creed; listening to Worldly-wiseman as he denounces orthodoxy and the veracity of Holy Writ, and giving heed to all manner of vain imaginations and teachings of science falsely so called. We turn to the world for our code of morals also, fearful of being called singular and strait-laced, preferring to go with the multitude rather than to side with truth and holiness. If, however, we are given to Christ we are dead unto the world and alive to him for evermore. His doctrine is our creed, his life is our pattern of conduct. He is become unto us wisdom and sanctification and righteousness and redemption. Therefore love not the world, neither the things of the world, for if any man love the world the love of God is not in him. (1 John 2:15.)

III. *Then follows coöperation with God.* To give ourselves to him and abstain from worldliness is to enter into his plans and purposes. In so doing we "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

No pleasure in this world is comparable with that of God's service. To serve him is to reign. The man who is at cross purposes with him cannot by the wildest stretch of the imagination be called a happy man. But to walk beside the great Workman as he reaps the harvest, to thrust in the sickle—dull sickle in a feeble hand!—to grow weary for him, to hear a word of encouragement from his lips, oh this is a foretaste of heaven itself!

In Paul's injunction respecting the service there are three things in particular worth noting: *First, Take your place and keep it.* "Let a man not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but soberly, according as God hath dealt to him the measure of faith." The man who declines to serve except with a cockade or chevrons is greatly in the way. Not all are qualified to be lieutenants, else where were the rank and file? The prayer of the best is, Put me where I belong. It may transpire that the lad who carried water to the masons was more worthy than the architect who planned the temple. It is a great misfortune for an underling anywhere to be above his place. Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. In the great company of the faithful there is a place for every one. The body of Christ has many members, "and every one members one of another; so that the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary." (1 Cor. 12: 12-26.) Wherefore let none think of himself more highly than he ought; but let each in his place be faithful according to the measure of grace which is given unto him.

Second, Use your gifts. If pride has its dangers so also has a lowly spirit. Servility is almost as bad as arrogance. The meanest man in Scripture is the man with one talent; he trusted neither God nor himself. But to the man who put out his ten pounds at usury the Master said, "Because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities." The wise and diligent use of whatever we have, whether much or little, is the ground of promotion. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given unto us, whether

prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation; he that imparteth let him do it liberally, he that ruleth with diligence, he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness." In any case, neglect not the gift that is in thee.

Third, Do your best in everything, even the least.

Here we come upon a series of brief maxims such as, "Let love be sincere; Abhor the evil; Cleave to the good; Be kindly affectioned in the love of the brethren; Be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Small matters these, yet they make the sum and substance of Christian living. For what is character but a necklace of virtues—small virtues all of them—strung together for the adorning of the King's bride? Let us take them in order as the apostle gives them: love, goodness, brotherly-kindness, diligence, cheerfulness, patience, prayerfulness, benevolence, hospitality, forgiveness, sympathy, humility, docility, integrity, and peaceableness withal. In these are briefly comprehended the duties which we owe to God, ourselves, and our fellow-men.

And this ethical discourse finds a suitable conclusion in the words, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The reward is for the overcomer. Life is no dress parade. Character is not won with a wooden sword. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Taking things easy means loss and failure. Truth and virtue are golden apples in the Lord's garden; but dragons guard the gate. To win manhood requires the spirit of a man. But the prize is worth the effort.

“Take heaven,” said one of the fathers, “with the wind in your face!” The flush of courage deepens with the tempest’s roar. We are men made in God’s likeness. We can be what we choose; we can go where we please; we can have all we want if only we quit ourselves like men.

Let us hear the voice of Him that walketh among the seven golden candlesticks: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna; and I will give him a white stone and a new name written therein which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God; and I will write upon him my new name.” What inspiration to holy living is here; what incentive to faithfulness, what strength for hard conflict in the high places of the field! Be not overcome of evil, therefore, O follower of the Lord, but overcome evil with good. He waits to welcome thee! He waits to crown thee!

ABSTINENCE FOR THE SAKE OF
OTHERS.

I COR. 8: 1-13.

It is said by Aristotle to have been the custom for successful contestants in the Isthmian games to celebrate by offering sacrifices in the temple of Poseidon, which were followed immediately by magnificent banquets; and the altars furnished forth the tables. No doubt there were some among these athletes who had friends in the Corinthian church, friends whom they desired to entertain at their feasts. If, however, a Christian accepted the invitation—and why not?—he found himself in a quandary. The meats upon the table had been previously laid upon the altars of the pagan gods. Should he partake of them? If he refused he might be charged with churlishness or scrupulosity. If he ate he might be regarded as a participant in pagan rites of worship. At this distance the matter seems of slight importance, a mere tempest in a teapot; but circumstances gave it such weight, and the argument was pursued with such asperity, that the church was likely to be rent asunder by it.

The interest in the controversy was not limited to the banquet-goers, for after the sacrifices were over such of the idol-meats as were not required for the festal celebrations were offered in the shambles, and whosoever would might purchase them. Perhaps it was not easy to distinguish between them and other meats; in any case they were savory and wholesome, and why should not Christians be free to partake of them? It was a vexatious question and had two sides to it.

Not a few of the church members in Corinth reserved the right to purchase and partake of these meats. They reasoned on this wise: "We know what we are doing and have no fear of the consequences. We are not fools that we should be easily enticed into our former superstitions. We understand the nothingness of idols and the emptiness of pagan rites. The meats that have been placed on their altars are neither worse nor better for it. Why then should we be prohibited from eating them?"

Where is the flaw in their argument? It is important that we should know, for theirs is the argument which underlies all the sophistries of individual freedom in every age. The apostle meets and controverts it with great clearness.

First, he alleges that *charity is better than knowledge*. "We all," says he, "have knowledge." We are all able to make a showing of reasonableness for our foibles and prejudices. The poorest cause may be bolstered by an argument. "We know! we know!" cry all the sophists; but, behold, we show unto you a better way! Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth, literally *buildeth up*. Self-vindication makes us conceited and dogmatic; but charity helps both us and others. It builds up character for ourselves, and rebuilds the tottering virtues of those about us.

The charity here referred to is the largest of the Christian graces. It is the Greek *ἀγάπη*, the Vulgate *charitas*; it is love in its broadest and deepest sense. It includes love towards God as well as towards men. It is like the constant commerce which is going on between the waters of the heavens and the earth; the rills trickle into the brooks, the brooks murmur towards the rivers, the rivers roll onward to the sea, and the seas are exhaled

into the clouds above to distill again in grateful showers and morning dews. So love is the constant means and medium of communion between God and his children. As South says, "It is the great instrument of nature, the bond and cement of society, the spirit and spring of the universe." Therefore, there can be nothing better than charity. It never faileth. "Whether there be prophecies they shall fail, whether there be tongues they shall cease, whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away;" but when all life's accumulation shall have evaporated, like water in the sun, its sole residuum shall be love.

"We know our franchise," said the Christian banqueters of Corinth; "we have knowledge as to the true character of idols and idol-worship, and are therefore in no danger of being led astray." "Knowledge! knowledge!" replies the apostle, "but what about love? If any man love God the same is known unto him, and that is the knowledge worth having." All the wisdom of the schools is not to be valued with the assurance that we love God; and "the same may be known unto us." If we have the filial spirit that says "Abba, Father," we shall cease quibbling and juggling in casuistical questions that edify not, and shall devote ourselves to pleasing him and making the lives of his children purer and happier. The best of knowledge shall be ours, indeed, but not for boasting. All graces shall abide, but charity will be first and last and greatest for ever and ever.

The apostle turns *secondly* to a consideration of *individual freedom*. For these Corinthian Christians were disposed to stand upon their rights. They said in effect, "There is no specific injunction as to these idol-meats in Scripture. The question is left to the individual conscience. Our consciences are clear; the meats do not

injure us. We therefore propose to do as we please about them." "Granted," says Paul, "I do not dispute your rights in these premises; but there are some important facts which you are in danger of losing sight of." He then reminds them (1) that the mere matter of eating or abstaining is in itself of slight consequence; "for meat commendeth us not to God; neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we eat not are we the worse." So small a matter therefore as a dish upon one's table should not be permitted to jeopardize the spiritual interests of any. If important issues shall appear to be involved, it ought to be an easy matter to give up the meat. (2) There are some weaker brethren who have less knowledge. To these the eating of the victim that has been offered in sacrifice is nothing less than complicity with the idolatrous rites; "for they with recognition of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled." These weaker brethren must not be left out of the reckoning. We are in a measure responsible for them. The Lord admonishes us that "offences" or occasions of stumbling must needs come, "but woe to him by whom the offence cometh; it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the midst of the sea." Am I, then, my brother's keeper? Aye, and if he fall over a stumbling-block of my making, I shall be held responsible for it. (3) Rights are relative. Some of them must bow down to others, as did the lesser stars to the greater in the patriarch's dream. A man's lowest right is to please himself; his highest is to deny himself for others. The Corinthian had the right to eat meat from the pagan altars, but he had also an unquestionable right to let it alone; and if so doing he might accomplish any

good whatsoever, then manifestly duty lay that way. Rights may conflict, but duties never; and duty always has the highest and uttermost claim. (4) As to individual freedom there is no such thing. If there were only one man in the universe he might be absolutely free to serve his own pleasure, but the moment you introduce another man there is a mutual restriction. Each is now free only so far as his freedom does not infringe upon the other. It is a mistake to think of freedom as license. There is, in fact, nothing in the world more circumscribed than true freedom. It is not lawlessness nor deliverance from restraint. Its best definition is, "Perfect obedience to perfect law." This being so, it is obvious that he who rightly apprehends "the glorious liberty of the children of God" will never presume to use it as a pretext for cutting loose from the supreme law of love. True, "we are no longer children of the bond-woman, but of the free." True, we have escaped from the mountain that burned with fire. But the statutes of Sinai are as green withes in comparison with the golden chains and manacles that are rivited upon the soul by that new commandment, "That ye love one another." He who comes forth from the bondage of the law into the liberty of the Gospel bows down, at the very threshold of his new life, and gives himself as a slave to serve the interests of his fellow men. He covenants, for Jesus' sake, to deny himself for others. If there is one thing above all else inculcated in the Scriptures it is that man can find no grander life than that of self-denial which spends and is spent, which forfeits all honor and emolument, which suffers and dies for the divine privilege of lifting up the souls of the fallen from darkness into light. The sweetest and noblest prerogative of the Christian is to abandon all rights, to lie down

in the dust and become a way for men to walk upon to the kingdom of God.

This leads us, *thirdly*, to consider with the apostle *the example of Christ himself*. When we find his footsteps we may safely walk in them. Impressive words are these, therefore, "Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?"

For whom Christ died! Is it true then that Jesus stooped to the infirmity of the least of his little ones? Is it true that the feeblest and most ignorant was counted worthy of his sympathetic consideration? Aye, and here are we, followers of his, haggling about meats and drinks! God forgive us, that we fall so far short of the mind that was in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Philippians 2:7 occurs a word about which there is much controversy. The word is *kenosis*; it means an *utter emptying*, and is applied to Christ's humiliation. When he crossed the threshold of heaven to undertake his redemptive work he laid aside crown, royal robes, heavenly retinue, everything, that he might restore the race of fallen men. He was free to remain where he was; but he put away his freedom and took upon himself the form of a servant for our sake. It was his right to reign, but he waived his right and became obedient unto death for our sake. Oh, by the love and devotion of our Lord, let us cease our clamoring for rights and prerogatives, and begin to ask "How may we empty ourselves as he did for the uplifting of the children of men?"

The words of the apostle have a close reference to the temperance reform in these days. It is not for us to question here the right of any man to take a social or even a convivial glass. The controversy must be held upon a loftier plane. Its decision is not to be brought about by

the analysis of Greek roots, the exegesis of particular texts of Scripture, or the settlement of historical questions as to the kind of liquors used in Oriental countries long ago. It is estimated that last year in the United States of America twelve hundred millions of dollars were spent for intoxicating drink. To a man who believes that the silver and the gold are God's, that fact must have an appalling significance. But here is another more significant still. An army of drunkards larger than the standing army of the most formidable of the nations of the earth is at this moment staggering down to the endless night. If we could but stand on the edge of the abyss as they totter upon it, we should hear the voice of retributive justice calling back out of the darkness, "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God." To thoughtful Christians a fact like this outweighs and quite obliterates the claim of personal right and freedom. Duty towers aloft like a beacon flaming from a headland on a tempestuous night. There is one thing to be done: the fallen must be lifted up, the lost must be reclaimed, the world must be saved at any cost. The Corinthian disciple who insisted on his right to partake of the idol-meats when admonished that souls were imperilled thereby, had but a mean conception of the responsibility of the Christian life. The man who clings to the wine-cup in these days has no better. If it be true that intoxicating drink is poison to the people of our land and age, if it fills our prisons with criminals and our poorhouses with paupers, if it corrupts our political and social life, if it cannot be used without endangering the sacred peace of home and the sweet flower of youth, if its enslavement is dragging a great multitude as with fetters of steel to the chambers of death and hell—facts that admit no doubt or peradventure—then our per-

sonal duty is as plain as if God had written it in fire across the heavens, "*Touch it not.*"

Let us learn our lesson under the cross. Was ever such self-denial, such self-oblation, such self-forgetfulness? Oh for more of the spirit of him who, though rich, for our sakes became poor, so poor that the very birds and foxes were richer than he! Farewell all rights and liberties, farewell all subtle arguments and fondly cherished prejudices; and welcome, welcome the joy of breaking the captives' chains and bidding the oppressed go free! The ideal life is that which counts all selfish considerations as the small dust when weighed in the balances against the welfare of an immortal soul. The bravest of the Old Guard at Waterloo was not a truer knight than the wounded carrier who crawled on hands and knees amid the carnage and darkness, putting his flagon to the parched lips of the dying. Those who stand upon their rights as men may win the honors of this world, but those who forget all birthright privileges in a passion of benevolence shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and he whose life was spent for others, and whose death was the ransom of a great multitude whom no man can number shall not be ashamed to call them brethren. The point at which humanity comes nearest to Deity is self-denial. Its best illustration is at Calvary where God stoops down to embrace his penitent children. The summit of human character is reached when a man gives himself for others. Christ did it. We also, for Christ's sake, must do it.

THE RESURRECTION.

I COR. 15:12-26.

THE doctrine of the resurrection is an essential of Christianity. But it is hard for us even to think of. There is comfort to us in knowing that the same wonder and questioning about it which we have existed in the minds of Christians at the dawn of church history. We need not accuse ourselves of being degenerate. Faith now is what it always was; it comes in the same way, has the same obstacles to overcome, has its life in the same source.

The chapter a part of which is given for our study is Paul's recognition of the questionings about the resurrection in the men of his day, and his answer to them, so far as an answer can be made in this life. For we walk by faith, not by sight. What he wrote is the best possible answer which can be made to those same questionings as they arise in our hearts.

The first eleven verses of the chapter contain the statement of the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus, with some mention of the evidence for it. It would be interesting to show the strength of this evidence. So strong is it that we may say that to deny the resurrection of Jesus is in effect to deny that there can be any such thing as history.

After stating the fact of the resurrection the apostle advances through a series of corroborative arguments.

He first (vv. 12-19) uses what is known as the logical method of *reductio ad absurdum*; that is, he supposes, for the sake of argument, the opposite of what he

wants to prove, that there is no resurrection ; and from that he shows that deductions follow which none of us is willing to accept. If then this supposed conclusion is false, the statement on which it rests is false. That is, it is false to say that there is no resurrection. " Now if it be preached that Christ rose, and is living, from death, how does it come to pass that some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead ? For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then of course Christ (who was a man and who died) was not raised ; and if Christ was not raised, then the preaching of myself and the other apostles is a preaching of what is untrue, and our faith has no basis in fact, and it must follow that we are deceivers, false witnesses, speaking in God's name what we know to be untrue, who at last are being found out ; for we have been witnessing, not for, but against God, that he raised up Christ, whom of course he did not raise up if the dead cannot be raised. But not only are we apostles falsifiers in that case, but look at the result upon your religion : for if the dead are not raised, as I said before, Christ, being a man, was not raised ; and if Christ was not raised, not only must your faith, like our preaching, be without any reasonable foundation, but it has no practical value. It is not only false, but useless and without any result. For your faith is that in Christ you have been freed from sin, have been reconciled to God, have been given a new motive and power in life, have been raised out of the foul air of evil to the high atmosphere of purity in Christ. But if Christ did not rise, which would prove at least the possibility of the resurrection, then your faith has no such result as you suppose, for you are still in your sins. But worse than that, those of your dear ones who have fallen asleep, the first generation of our Chris-

tian dead, Stephen whose face shone like an angel's, James the brother of John, who also won the martyr's crown, these are not, as we supposed, freed from sin and entered into glory, but in the other world find their hope an illusion, find themselves still in sin, find themselves perishing in eternal death. So, to sum up, if all there is to faith is merely to have hope for the present, only at last to discover that our hope was baseless, then of all men in existence we Christians are the most to be pitied. Far more fortunate than we are those who have no hope and consequently no disappointment, if we build the structure of faith, only at last to have it vanish like a bubble."

That is a passage in every way worthy of the keen and honest mind of the great apostle. Notice several things about it.

1. Paul does not confuse the resurrection of the dead with the immortality of the soul. The two are not the same, nor are the proofs for one the proofs for the other. Not a small number of scientific men hold that there are certain scientific arguments which give to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul a very high degree of probability. They hold that it can be reasonably proven entirely without respect to Scripture. But the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is wholly a matter of revelation. We would not have guessed it, or come at it in any other way, unless God through his inspired apostles had told us. The soul might conceivably be immortal and still there not necessarily be any resurrection of the body. It is only the second point that the apostle has here in mind.

2. Paul reasons closely in pressing the necessary conclusion from Christ's rising. If we make a universal

negative statement of any sort, and one instance to the contrary is ever found, the whole statement is disproven. There is a law that inorganic matter cannot of itself turn into organic. But if anybody ever saw a single handful of earth, of itself, without the gift of any external germ, turn into some form of life, the law that inorganic matter cannot of itself become organic would be disproven. We say that all men must die. But a solitary instance where, without divine intervention, one did not die, would explode that "must." So when it is said that the resurrection of the dead is impossible, a solitary instance to the contrary is enough to show that it is possible. If Christ rose, then so may we.

3. Paul exhibits the noble liberality of the real seeker after truth. He was not the man to suggest that so long as an illusion does no harm it is all right to leave it undisturbed. Some men say, "We have risen above Christian credulity, but so long as you Christians are satisfied in your pleasant dream and it does you no harm, we will not be cruel enough to disillusion you." Is this honesty? Is this respect for truth? No. It is the degradation of intelligence. Paul says frankly, "If Christ did not rise from the dead, then I am a liar; and not an unconsciously deceived liar, but a deliberate, wilful one."

4. Paul shows that the resurrection of Christ is a chief part of Christian preaching. This is corroborated by looking over the New Testament. When an apostle was chosen to take Judas' place, Matthias was named because he was a witness of Christ's resurrection. (Acts 1:22.) When Peter addressed the multitude at Pentecost, he discoursed on the resurrection. (Acts 2:24.) When he spoke to the crowd after having healed the lame man at the gate of the Temple, he mentioned the

resurrection. (Acts 3:15.) When he was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, he told them of the resurrection. (Acts 4:10.) When he was imprisoned and forbidden to preach, he said he must preach the resurrection. (Acts 5:30.) At Cæsarea his theme is the same. (Acts 10:40.) Paul preached on the same subject at Antioch in Pisidia. (Acts 13:30.) And it was his reference to Christ's resurrection that caused his speech on Mars' Hill to seem ridiculous to the Athenians. (Acts. 17:31.) So the fact of Christ's resurrection lies at the very foundation of Christianity. To be a Christian means in part to believe that Christ rose from the dead; and if Christ did not rise from the dead, Christianity is a falsehood. Then no religion at all is possible, for we have found this to be the highest; and if this must go, the world will never content itself with anything lower. Surely, if Christ did not rise, we are, of all men, most miserable.

Paul now turns away from the dark prospect of this negative argument to state a positive argument. This is double: *first*, because as by one man the evil entered which we know to be in the world, so also, unless the universe be altogether dark and hopeless, by one man there must be a restoration of some sort: "Christ, in virtue of his incarnation, is the new head of humanity." (J. C. Edwards.) He became like us in order that we might become like him. The human race fell; the race rises; and in its rising it must have all the natural elements of humanity which it had in its fall. The *second* part of Paul's positive argument comes from his belief in God and his sovereignty. If there is a God he must be a ruler. He must be able to subject all things to himself. If he lifts man, he must be able to transform him. If he

gives him freedom, he must be able to conquer all the opponents that man has. Christ conquers all things and last the greatest enemy of all, death, is conquered, because even that outer destruction, which is so terrible a sign of death's power, is overcome by the resurrection. And so Christ, having conquered all things, submits to God, and God is at last all in all (vv 20-28).

Paul had shown at first a dark picture. He had filled his canvas with misery. Now he dips his brush in gold-dust, and with a shout of triumph he dashes its glory all over the black picture of despair. That picture is false. "For the truth is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits, the earnest of the rising of millions who have fallen asleep. He is the pledge because he is the cause." (Edwards.) For as the race fell through man, it needs redemption through man. As it was through one man, Adam, that death came to all, so through one man, Christ, all shall be made alive. But there is order in the universe. Being rises in tiers. Between God above and man below, partaking with both, stands Christ. Each takes his own place in the order of events. First, Christ rises from the dead, the mediator, the first-fruits; then they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, the close of history, when Christ shall deliver up the kingdom which he hath conquered to God, even the Father, when he shall have brought to naught all hostile angelic rule, authority, and power. For Christ must reign until he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be brought to naught is death.

To a mind without religion this second positive argument of Paul's means nothing. But in his first (negative) argument he supposed the need of religion. We

want Christ. We must have him. But to believe Christ involves believing in his resurrection. What that resurrection means in the sphere of religion Paul shows. It means the complete renewal of humanity, which is the aim of all religion; and a renewal which is complete must take cognizance of the body. Then with a grand outlook over all history and its meaning, with a belief that God is king, Paul sees at last the great spectacle of God's perfect reign over all things, in which death must be included. If one believes in a future for humanity, when all its present limitations shall be destroyed; and if he believes that God reigns, that there is an unceasing purpose running through the ages, he is driven to the expectation that death shall at last be conquered; which cannot be true unless the havoc death has wrought be overcome and the body be restored.

Paul's argument, when we thus come to understand it, speaks for itself. Nevertheless some things in it deserve special emphasis.

1. Christ's resurrection is a fact. We say is rather than was, because he now has in glory the same resurrection body once seen on earth. The fact began to be eighteen hundred years ago, but continues still in his possession of the same body. We may be touching something mysterious here, but that a thing is mysterious is nothing whatever against its being true, nor against our acceptance of it as true, since not a thousandth part of the things we know do we understand.

2. Christ's resurrection is an integral part of Christianity. Prof. Huxley tells us it is foolish for us Christians to stake our religion upon the verity of one fact, and that so hard to accept. Nevertheless, that is just what we do, and we challenge any one to prove the fact untrue,

and promise if he succeeds to give up our religion. We could not do this were we not, with Paul, convinced in experience that Christianity is true.

But there could be no Christianity without Christ having risen. He rose not only to prove his still being in existence, but in rising he accomplished a saving work. If he had not risen salvation would not have been fully accomplished. Because one part of the power of sin (that, namely, by which it produces physical death) would not have been overcome. When Christ rose all of sin's power was crushed.

3. Our own resurrection accordingly is a necessary part of our Christian hope. Perhaps we have fancied that immortality without any body would be enough for us. But our triumph is not complete, and our existence is not fully rounded out, until we have the body that shall be.

4. What is that resurrection body? God has not told us all we sometimes would like to know about it. But we know (a) that it will be a body, something in addition to the soul, (b) that it will be spiritual, conformed to the spiritual nature of our being, and (c) that it will have some identity with the body we now have, although he would be bold who would undertake to go beyond Scripture and say exactly in what that identity will consist. But there is no doubt that Christ carried into glory with him a body which in some sense could be called the same which felt the nails and the spear.

THE GRACE OF LIBERALITY.

2 COR. 8:1-12.

THE Christians of the Jerusalem church were in sore trouble. A feeble folk at the best, they were now reduced to an extremity by famine. At this juncture the advantage of Christian fellowship was brought into clear light. Paul and Barnabas took it upon themselves, by divine appointment, to call upon the more favored brethren for help (Acts 11:27-30). They received prompt contributions from the churches in Achaia, also from those in Macedonia (Rom. 15:26). A strong appeal was made to the churches of Galatia (1 Cor. 16:1). The congregation at Rome, made up largely of Gentiles, some of whom were wealthy and influential, was exhorted to do its part (Rom. 15:27). And in the Scripture before us the matter is presented to the Corinthian Christians in a way to stir their deepest and most substantial sympathy. It was a splendid opportunity for displaying the genuineness of Christian unity, "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and the churches were not slack to improve it. Gifts were proffered before the asking, contributions were pressed upon the commissioners "with much entreaty" (2 Cor. 8:4), and the outsiders at Jerusalem were given to understand in a most conclusive way that the fellowship of Christ's disciples was not an empty boast. In the generous gift of the Gentile Christians of Corinth they perceived that the middle walls of partition had indeed been broken down and that Jew and Gentile were kinsmen in Christ Jesus. "Behold," said they, "how these brethren love one another." And this was an in-

controvertible token of practical Christianity. Our polemics and apologetics may be answered; but the world keeps silence while we sing,

“We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.”

In appealing to the Corinthian church the apostle makes mention of the liberality of their brethren in Macedonia, hoping thus to provoke them to good works. He relates “how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.” For at the very time when these Macedonians were sending on their gifts to Jerusalem they themselves were groaning under a two-fold yoke of poverty and persecution. Nevertheless they furnished forth a pattern of benevolence. *First*, they gave voluntarily. They did not need to be exhorted; they did not even wait to be asked. They were “willing of themselves” and prayed the apostles “with much entreaty to receive the gift.” They gave with spontaneity, with good cheer, with abandon. They gave not as a deep well gives to the toiler at the windlass, but as a fountain gives to the wounded hart that stands panting at its brink. *Second*, they gave largely: “to their power, yea, and beyond it.” It is easy to give out of one’s abundance, but out of one’s poverty—ah, there’s the trial of it. When David was offered the ground for his altar as a gratuity he refused it, saying, “I will not offer unto the Lord that which doth cost me nothing” (2 Sam. 24: 24). Most of us would have thanked Araunah and accepted it; but in so doing we would have lost the sweet savor of devotion. God does not want

our crippled lambs and the superflux of our harvests. Self-denial is the first step in consecration. The virtue of sacrifice lies largely in the cost of it. *And third*, they gave from principle. The beginning of their generosity and its motive and inspiration lay in this, that "they first of all gave their own selves to the Lord." After that everything was easy. When self is given, time and talent and treasure flow naturally to the Master's feet. We are his, and all that we have or hope to have, all that we are or hope to be, belong of right to him. We are his; and his disciples, who are our brethren in the fellowship of faith, are entitled to the kinsman's portion. But in default of the initial gift, if self be withheld at the outset, in everything we are small and stingy, reluctant and parsimonious for evermore.

Great givers and blessed were those poor, persecuted Christians of Macedonia, fit to be held up at Corinth as patterns of liberality, and quite worthy to set the example for us in these last days. In pursuance of Paul's exhortation let us apply ourselves for a few moments to the *rationale* of giving. Let us note some of the reasons why God's people, "as they abound in everything, in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in diligence, and in brotherly love, should abound in this grace also."

First, because giving is a grace. It is not a mere adjunct or incident of the Christian life, but one of its cardinal and essential graces. Whether a disciple of Christ shall make a practice of giving or not is no more an open question than whether he shall pray or not. The rule of holy living is never selfishness, but always self-forgetfulness. "If you wish to be miserable," says Charles Kingsley, "you must think about yourself — about what you want, what you like, what respect people ought to pay to

you, what people think of you ; then you will spoil everything you touch and be as miserable as you choose." Contrariwise, if you want to feel like a Christian you must catch the Christian spirit of expenditure, of communication (1 Tim. 6 : 18), of dividing up self for others as if self were a loaf and all the world were hungry. This was the mind that was in Christ Jesus and this must be the disposition of those who follow him.

Second, it is in the line of common honesty. We are stewards of the gifts of God. The silver and the gold are his. We hold nothing in fee simple, not even our houses and lands ; for God gave us brain and sinew to acquire them. In common life we visit no class of malefactors with a greater measure of odium than unfaithful stewards, such as are false to trusts reposed in them. We need to realize more and more that our relation to God with respect to our possessions is that of stewardship, and in that capacity to quit ourselves as honest men. Is it not strange that we should speak of "our" houses and barns, "our" bonds and mortgages, "our" principal and interest? Is it not strange that men, professing to be rigidly honest—who would rather a finger should be severed from their right hand than that their note should go to protest—will yet appropriate to their own uses year after year the earnings which belong to God?

Third, giving is a fruitful source of happiness. "It is more blessed," said the Master, "to give than to receive." And this is the testimony of all who have ever tried it.

"The old squire said, as he stood by his gate
And his neighbor the deacon went by,
'In spite of my bank-stock and real estate,
You're better off, deacon, than I.

“ We're both growing old and the end's drawing near ;
You have less of this world to resign ;
But in heaven's appraisal your assets, I fear,
Will reckon up greater than mine.

“ They say I am rich, but I'm feeling so poor
I wish I could swap with you even,
The pounds I have lived for and laid up in store
For the shillings and pence you have given.' ”

A hundred years ago the Rev. Thomas Gibbons preached and wrote poetry ; but of his sermons and poems all that remains worth remembering is this verse :

“ That man may last, but never lives,
Who much receives but nothing gives ;
Whom none can love, whom none can thank,
Creation's blot, creation's blank.”

Fourth, giving is a means of getting. Let us observe the testimony of Scripture on this point, “ Trust in the Lord and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” “ Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first-fruits of all thine increase ; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” “ There is that scattereth and yet increaseth ; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat ; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.” “ He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth to the Lord ; and that which he hath given He will pay him again.” “ And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity and thy darkness be as noonday, and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones ; and thou shalt be watered like a garden, and like springs of water, whose

waters fail not." "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground, neither shall your vine cast her fruit, before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts." "Give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again." "I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound towards you; that ye always having all-sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work."

Mr. Thomas Kane, who has devoted his life to the study of systematic benevolence, says, "My belief is that God blesses in temporal as well as in spiritual things the man who honors him by setting apart a stated portion of his income to his service. I have never known an exception. Have you?"

It is a true proverb, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet and it tendeth unto poverty." (Prov. 11:24.) John Bunyan wrote,

"A man there was, and people called him mad,
The more he gave away the more he had."

Is it not always so? How else shall we construe the promise, "Blessed is the liberal man; his horn shall be exalted"? No man ever yet grew poor by lending to the Lord. In an English graveyard is this quaint epitaph, dated A. D. 1579:

"Who! who! who's here?
I, Robert of Doncaster.
That I spent, that I had;
That I gave, that I have;
That I left, that I lost."

Fifth, this is the noblest end of money-making. Some men get to hoard. These are misers. They are consumed by *auri sacra fames*, the accursed hunger of gold. Others get to spend. They value money for what it will purchase of the comforts and pleasures of life. If this however be carried to excess it makes self-pleasing our supreme end. Still others get to give. So the apostle exhorts the reformed idler of Ephesus to "work with his own hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth." (Eph. 4:28). Our accumulations of wealth, great or little, can find no better use than in the relief of indigence and the propagation of the gospel.

"But for one end are riches worth your care:
To make humanity the minister
Of bounteous Providence."

Sixth, our giving is God's method for the conversion of the world. It is God's purpose that all nations should be evangelized. But there are still multitudes who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Why? God works through human instrumentalities. He is waiting until we are ready. Our wealth must furnish the sinews of the holy war. The average contribution of American

Christians for foreign missions is about ten cents a year. This is so far short of the requirement that it merely serves to reveal their failure to comprehend the situation. Their parsimony shuts the gates of heaven and keeps the world in darkness. Whenever God's people are everywhere and every way ready to do their part, the "restitution of all things" will speedily come. But ten cents a year will not accomplish it. We are greatly distressed for the heathen, just as the disciples were for the hungry multitude in the desert place. "Give ye them to eat," said Jesus. "Give ye the gospel to the nations," he says to us.

"All that united Protestant Christendom raises annually for missions," says Joseph Cook, "would not pay the liquor bill of the United States for three days, nor that of the British Islands for two. At the opening of the century all Protestant Christendom expended only \$250,000 annually for missions. To-day it expends \$7,500,000. This is a large sum, you think. A mere bagatelle. The dissipations of Saratoga and Newport would hardly find this sum worth mentioning in the hugeness of their expenses for self-gratification." We are accustomed to pray, "Thy kingdom come." God's kingdom will come whenever we really want it to come. Our gifts are the token of our sincerity. Our money will answer our prayer.

The great sin of Christendom to-day is withholding from the Lord. When Cortes marched into Mexico with his rapacious army he told the natives he was afflicted with a disease which nothing but gold could cure. Alas that the same disease should have infected the followers of Christ. His word is, "Go sell all that thou hast, and come and follow me." He will never possess our hearts nor use us wholly to his glory until we shall cast out Briareus with his hundred hands.

Seventh, the example of Christ teaches us to give.

He was the greatest of givers. He gave everything he had for our deliverance from sin and death. He gave his time, his physical and mental strength, his personal endowments of every sort, his life, himself. He came from heaven to give good gifts to men—sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, peace to the troubled soul, rest to the weary and heavy laden, the song of salvation to such as were sitting in the shadow of death. Loving to give, he freely gave us all. And what shall we render unto him? Are gold and frankincense and myrrh too precious to lay before him? Is ointment of spikenard too costly for the anointing of his feet—the feet that were shod with the sandals of salvation and pierced with nails that retribution had forged for us? The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Is anything too good for him?

IMITATION OF CHRIST.

EPH. 4:20-32.

THE epistles of Paul are pervaded by the suggestion of two personalities in the believer, the old man and the new man. The old man is corrupt according to the lusts of deceit, while the new man is after God created in righteousness and true holiness. The new man is born at conversion, and thenceforward there is a conflict in the double self. The old man is moribund. The process of death is going on in him continually. The new man grows more and more into the likeness of Christ. The new man is progressively renewed after the image of Him who created him. (Col. 2:10.) The old man is crucified with Christ; the new man lives, lives with growing fulness of life, and the life which he lives is by faith in the Son of God. The old man is wedded to sin and shame; the new man is an heir of life and immortality. The old man is a hoary reprobate; the new man is destined to live for ever with the beauty of an immortal youth.

It is easy to mark this double personality in the apostle himself. The old man is Saul of Tarsus, proud of his birth and lineage, proud of his learning, self-opinionated, trained in the barren ceremonial of Jewish worship, a hater and persecutor of the Christians, breathing out slaughter against them. The new man is the apostle Paul, brought out of darkness into light and made acquainted with Jesus as his Saviour and Friend, counting all things but loss

that he may win Christ, making light of his Jewish inheritance, his rhetorical culture, and his philosophy, that he may know Christ and him crucified. The new man, Paul, is constantly striving with the old man, Saul. The new man born unto spiritual life is ever keeping his body under. Two wills are at work (for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I). But every day marks a distinct progress leading on to an ultimate triumph. The old man must dwindle and die; the new man will attain unto the fulness of the stature of Christ.

Paul is writing to the Christians at Ephesus. They were exposed to peculiar temptations. The church of Ephesus was under the very shadow of the splendid temple of the great Diana. The people who worshipped Christ in Ephesus were witnesses of the imposing rites and ceremonies and the magnificent games in honor of the pagan goddess. Their temptation was to conform their lives to the idolatrous and pleasure-seeking customs of their heathen neighbors. It was easy then, as it is to-day, to fall into line and keep step with the multitude in the fashions of the hour. But the line of demarcation between a Christian and a pagan life must be observed. There was a difference. The Christians of Ephesus must be guarded. Paul begs them to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called; to walk not as other Gentiles walked, in the vanity of their mind. Then comes this injunction concerning the putting off of the old man with his deceitful lusts, and the putting on of the new man, who after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

It is related of Cato that he never spoke in the Senate, never worshipped at the altar, rarely conversed with his fellow-citizens, without uttering the words, "Delenda est Carthago!" "Carthage must be destroyed!" He hated

Carthage as the deadly rival of Rome. Both could not live and prosper. The world was not wide enough to contain these two implacable foes. As the disciples of Christ it behooves us to take a like stand in behalf of truth and righteousness, and to pledge undying enmity against our unregenerate nature. Let the old man die the death, that we may be ever more and more renewed in the spirit of our minds.

He who is truly converted is ever conscious of this conflict between his spiritual nature and the remnant of his former unregenerate self. His growth is measured by his earnestness to put away his former conversation which was "corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," and to foster the new man which is created after God. The new birth is rightly so called. At our conversion old things pass away, all things become new. The heart of stone is supplanted by a heart of flesh; the will, the heart, the conscience are made over after God. A young girl who was converted under Whitefield's preaching was asked at her examination for admission to the church, "Have you a new heart?" She answered, "I cannot tell whether it is a new heart or not; something is new, I know. Everything seems new; the sun shines brighter, the grass seems greener, the whole world is sweeter and better since I found the Saviour." And the more we know of Him, the truer is it that old things pass away and all things become new. Observe here some of the characteristics of the new man.

I. Truth. "Put away lying," said the apostle; "speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another." Truth is a debt that we owe to society, yet we are none of us as candid as we ought to be. The common sin is hypocrisy, for

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women are merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts."

This is true in all departments of life, in business, in society, in politics, ay, even in the church. Froude says, "I have heard thousands of sermons and discourses and homilies on Faith, on the Apostolic Succession, on the Efficacy of the Sacrament, but never during these thirty wonderful years, never that I can recollect, one on that primitive commandment, 'Thou shalt not lie;' yet we have lying all around us, false weights, false measures, and shoddy everywhere." Let us who are Christians and followers of Christ unmask; let us be what we seem to be; let our lives be transparent as the light. Here is our prayer:

"Lord, make me like thyself,
Lord, make me be myself,
Seeming as one who lives for thee,
And being what I seem to be."

II. Equanimity. "Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil." Let it be noted that Christian equanimity is not stoicism. The Stoic met his fate with indifference, because there was no escaping from it. So the Brahmin, the twice-born Yogi, sits by the wayside breathing the dust raised by the passing sacred cows and muttering to himself the sacred syllable *Oum* over and over and over again, indifferent to all things around him. The Vedas are open upon his knees; he is losing himself in Brahm. You may affront him as you will, hurl missiles at him; no matter, still he gazes before him and mutters *Oum, oum, oum*. This is not equanimity, but stolidity,

mere phlegm, as far removed as possible from the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

There are two sides to Christian equanimity: one side of it is this, "Be angry;" the other side is this, "Sin not." It is a man's duty to be angry whenever there is occasion for it. There are things occurring every day that ought to arouse our keenest indignation. But yesterday a rum-seller whipped his boy with a rawhide until the welts on his limbs had crippled him and the boy went hobbling through the streets, screaming with pain, the blood trickling down over his feet. What sort of a man would he be whose wrath would not be aroused by the brutality of that inhuman father? There are those on every side who are laying snares for the unwary feet of youth, both boys and girls, young men and maidens, in dives and gambling-hells and dram-shops and nameless abodes of sin. What sort of a Christian would he be who would not fall into line with any movement looking towards their overthrow? And there are public servants all the while engaged in throwing the ægis of the law over vices which are defying the laws, and saying to the people, their masters, "What are you going to do about it?" Over against these things there must needs be a holy indignation. God is angry with such iniquities and those who perpetrate them every day.

"And being angry, sin not." Do no rash thing. Lynch law may be as bad as the crime which it aims to punish. Do all things justly. Cherish no grudge; hate the sin, but reserve love for the sinner. "Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath." The Jews, who were accustomed to repeat this proverb, thought that wrath at eventide would spoil the evening sacrifice. Our Lord hung dying on the cross, and as the day wore on and the time of the evening

sacrifice drew near, he uttered the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Let this mind which was in Christ Jesus be in all you who profess to love him.

III. Occupation. "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Honesty and industry are true yoke-fellows. The tramp is a thief. To every man who enters into the fellowship of Christ the same question is propounded which met Jacob when he entered Egypt, "What is your occupation?"

It is significant that the Author and Finisher of our Faith was a carpenter. He believed in the dignity of labor. He entered into the fellowship of toilers. It is difficult to see how any one can be a consistent follower of Jesus unless with brain or brawn, or both, he joins "the great fellowship of busy men."

What makes a man? A hundred and fifty pounds of bone and sinew do not make a man. A man is body and soul in action. Every one of us is either a producer or a cumberer of the ground. We are making the world better by the expenditure of vital energy, or else we are living by exaction upon it.

The time was when labor was disreputable, when even lawyers and clergymen were under the patronage of gentlemen, when brains were under servitude to pounds and pence, and the physician, the squire, and the roving tinker sat down together at the kitchen table. The higher class were exempt from mental as well as physical toil; their days were spent in the chase and their nights in wassail. If a young man were ambitious to make something of himself, to do something for the world, no field

was open to him but the lists of knighthood. He fixed a plume in his hat, mounted a steed, and set out to tilt for the honor of a lady's glove. Blessed be God we have come upon better days. "The true epic of our times," says Carlyle, "is not 'arms and the man,' but tools and the man." Let all the followers of the Nazarene Carpenter see to it that as becometh the new man who is created in righteousness and true holiness, they lend themselves to the advancement of the world's industry, each one of them in his place having something to do and doing it well.

IV. Wholesome Speech. There is no single word that will express it. Paul says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers, and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

The gift of the Holy Ghost for the conversion of the world is the gift of tongues. To speak unwisely, impurely, or profanely is to grieve the Spirit of God.

The tongue is a little member, but it boasteth great things, for "behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. Behold, also, the ships, which though they be so great and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." Jas. 3: 3-6.

As our Lord was passing through the coasts of Decapolis, one was brought to him who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and he was besought to

heal him, but before saying, "Ephphathà," he looked up to heaven and sighed. Why did Jesus sigh? Was it because of the responsibility of the gift of speech which he was about to bestow upon this man? Was it because he surmised that it would not be used well and wholly to the glory of God? A follower of Christ cannot be over-careful as to the manner of his speech. The lips that have named the name of Jesus ought never to utter an untrue or an impure thought. Corrupt communications have in them enormous possibilities of evil. The wreckers who kindle fire upon the headlands to lure unwary mariners upon a dangerous coast are not more truly malignant than such as pervert with corrupt speech the trembling sailors threading the currents of social life. For impurity eats like a canker. It destroys the fine edge of character.

But words in due season, how good they are! Words of truth, of power, of purity, of sympathy, how good they are! There comes to me at this moment through the glamour of years a sweet face looking down into mine. I feel the light hand upon my shoulder, I hear the encouraging word. It was spoken when I was a lad, long ago, a kind word by the minister's wife, who thought to help me in my new Christian life. Little she knew the good it wrought. To-day that good word shines undimmed like an apple of gold through the meshes of a silver basket.

V. Kindness. Kindness above all. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." This is the larger grace of the renewed life, this is the glory of the new man in Christ Jesus, to do good. The law of kindness is in his heart.

It is written that Christ himself went about doing good. He was kindness itself to heal, to sympathize, to uplift and strengthen. These were common events in his life. The touch of his garment had virtue in it. "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole," said the woman with the issue of blood, and she was right, for to touch him was to receive the electric spark of virtue. No one can touch Jesus to this day without feeling the divine life surging into him and thrilling through him. The apostles of Jesus brought somewhat of this blessed gift from him. It is written they brought forth the sick into the streets, "that at the least the shadow of Peter, passing by, might overshadow some of them."

It is the part of every follower of Christ to use this gracious gift. There is nothing in the world that warms the heart like the doing of a gracious deed. The last word of Charles V. of France was this: "Kings are happiest in doing good." We may go farther and say that every man is most kingly, most Christlike, when the law of kindness dwells in his heart and finds expression in his unselfish life.

This, then, is the picture of the new man in Christ Jesus. It is outlined as the silhouette of Christian character. The new man in Christ Jesus is the best expression of human character, because he is the nearest approach to Christ himself, who is the ideal man. To set forth these graces of character is to be a constant though possibly unconscious dispenser of inestimable good. Forty years ago a young man applied to one of our Boards of Foreign Missions for an appointment as missionary to India. In natural gifts and education he was so far below the usual requirements that his application was refused at once. But, persisting, he entreated that he might go. At last, by reason of his intense desire and fervent piety and zeal,

his prayer was granted. His first effort on reaching the field was to master the native tongue. It was hard work. Months and years passed by, and his dull intellect seemed like a sieve: he could not acquire the language. At last, after five years, he gave up in despair, and wrote a letter to the Board humbly confessing his failure and asking to be recalled. But in the meantime the native Christians had seen his godly character and life and had learned to love him. By the same vessel that brought his letter to the Board they also sent a letter earnestly protesting against his departure, saying that his life among them in its purity and benevolence was a mightier argument for the truth than learning or eloquence could be, and that even the heathen had come to respect him as a godly man. He was allowed to remain. Multitudes of souls were given him for his hire, and his memory is fragrant in that far-off land unto this day. Verily, he has been a living epistle, known and read of all men.

Our most eloquent sermon is holiness, our grandest miracle a spotless character. The sum of all duties is comprehended in the precept "Let your light shine." Christ is the Sun of Righteousness; our influence for good is but a torch kindled at that Sun. Our lives will be holy and unconsciously beneficent and immortal for good so far forth as they are inspired from that perfect life. To be good is to do good. Our souls washed in the atoning blood and made whiter than snow, and thereupon impressed with all the beauty of the Christian character, we cannot then but show forth the virtue and omnipotence of the gospel to make men partakers of eternal life.

THE CHRISTIAN HOME.

COL. 3:12-25.

THIS Epistle was written by Paul when a prisoner at Rome. He was much concerned for "the saints and faithful brethren which were at Colossæ." Their pastor Epaphras had informed him as to their spiritual welfare and had probably advised with him as to certain evils which prevailed among them. This was the immediate occasion of the earnest injunctions and admonitions with which this Epistle abounds. The portion of it which here engages our attention touches life along its whole circumference, but a useful purpose may be served in limiting its application to the duties of the social and domestic circle.

The Christian home—an essential outgrowth of the gospel—lies at the centre of the best civilization the world has ever known.

There are dwellings which cannot be called homes. The word suggests something more than four walls and a roof. Home is indeed a dormitory and a refectory, a castle for security, a cloister for seclusion, but something still beyond. It is the trysting-place of love; it is the House Beautiful on earth's highest mountain-top, with its windows open to the eastern sun. We wander into countries far away, but on quiet evenings to the end of life we sing fondly and regretfully of "Home, sweet home." Lowly it may have been, but it held our loved ones. In lieu of rare carvings and tapestries we recall the great open fireplace, the well-sweep, the hollyhocks and sweet-williams in mother's garden. Ah, "be it ever so humble, there's

no place like home !' The thought of its restfulness lightens our burdens and relieves our cares. The ploughman catching sight of it at the hill's brow whistles as he pursues his task.

"His wee bit ingle, blinkin' bonnily,
His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie wifie's smile,*
The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary, carking care beguile,
An' makes him quite forget his labor and his toil."

One of the best tests of personal religion is found in the home-life. No spiritual diagnosis is complete or conclusive until it has opened up a man's behavior in his domestic relations. Indeed, our religion is meant to touch life at every point, to make us better friends and neighbors, better citizens, better cosmopolites. But home is, in a sense, the centre of the circle. Tell us what sort of a husband and father a man is and we can easily fill up the silhouette of his character. The injunctions of Paul, therefore, in this particular are of no slight importance. The precepts that were helpful to the early Christians are not obsolete. Our homes are disturbed by the same intrusive faults that chilled the atmosphere and dimmed the lights in the homes of Colossæ: nor have we any *errata* or *addenda* to affix to Paul's list of the domestic virtues. Let us briefly observe them; for therein lies the secret of a happy home.

First, love. If love be absent all other graces are like a chorus without a *choragos*. "Put on therefore, as God's elect, the vital mercies of compassion." A home without kindness is a misnomer. The love of husband and wife, the love of parents and children, the love of brothers and sisters, these are fire on the hearth, lights on the mantel, and pictures on the walls. If these are want-

ing the family circle is as dissonant and unhappy as an ill-assorted litter. The first duty in this relation is to keep sweet ; and a sweet disposition is the outward showing of a heart well and kindly inclined towards all.

Second, "humbleness of mind." This is not servility. We may be humble and still self-respectful. True humility is based upon a right estimate of one's relative importance. Rights we have ; but so have others. The moment we insist upon a right which trenches on our neighbor's we are guilty of arrogance. Humility does not grovel, but it steps aside and gives half the path to a fellow-traveller. John Milton speaks of "that lofty lowliness of mind which is exalted by its own humiliation." This spirit is essential to domestic concord. The comfort of a house where husband and wife are at variance and children clamor for their own is scarcely to be preferred to that of a sty at feeding-time. The very youngest—"Philip, my king"—is oftentimes spoiled for life by an undue humoring of his pettish whims. The secret of domestic peace lies largely in a just recognition of mutual relations, a proper deference of the younger to the elder, and wisdom on the part of every member of the household not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. "Each in his place" is a maxim that might well accompany the legend "God bless our home!"

Third, long-suffering. The apostle deems this worthy of amplification in the words, "forbearing one another, if any of you have a quarrel against any ; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." There is constant need of the exercise of this grace in our social and domestic relations. For, alas, love we never so fervently, the quarrel is like to come. This has been known to occur even in that heavenly circle known as "the household of

faith;" but whether at home or in the church, among kinsfolk in the flesh or brethren in Christ, the preventive is forbearance and the cure is forgiveness. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city. At a wedding which the writer attended so long ago that it abides among the earliest memories of his boyhood there was, among the gifts offered to the newly-wedded pair, a mysterious box bearing the inscription "Two Bears." On being opened it was found to contain two rude ursine effigies named respectively *Bear* and *Forbear*. If these were kindly received and cared for at the fireside, it was claimed by the facetious donor that there would be an unbroken continuance of domestic peace.

Fourth, charity. "And above all these things put on charity." This grace is called "the bond of perfectness" because it is the silver cord on which all pearls are threaded (1 Cor. 13). It is a larger grace than love, as used in this connection, for it includes the loyalty of the soul to God. If this be omitted there is no bond of perfectness; the home-life is liable at any moment to fall asunder like an unstrung necklace. It is proper, therefore, that under this head of charity the apostle should speak of the family altar. "Let the gospel dwell in you richly," he says, "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Nor is this enough: "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

A glance through the window of a Christian home reveals the father in the midst with "the old ha' Bible" on his knees. Enriched by the opening up of the hid treasures of truth, all kneel in prayer; and the voice of melo-

dious gratitude is lifted to Him who hath set the solitary in families. The word of Christ dwelleth richly there in all wisdom while they thus admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. And without this simple "show of piety" (1 Tim. 5:4) no home can be complete. Without it the dwelling, however attractive, is a mere lodge in a garden of cucumbers, and really no home at all.

It has been observed that the early churches all took their rise in the worship of family groups. "The church in the house of Philemon"—that is, the little circle of kinspeople and neighbors that gathered around his domestic altar—grew into the church at Colossæ. "The church in the house of Nymphas" was afterwards known as the church at Laodicea; while that in the tent-makers' shop of Aquila diverged into two mighty channels of influence in the churches of Rome and Ephesus. Thus signally has God been pleased to honor the love—that broad and comprehensive *caritas*—which admits him into the most sacred and important circle of human life. In the Old Economy as well as in the New his benediction has been upon it. For our family altar is but in continuance of the duty that was imposed upon Israel when they received the holy oracles: "Hear, O Israel! The words which I command thee shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children. Thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand; and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house and upon thy gates."

Fifth, peace. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." God's peace is most manifest in the presence of

his well beloved Son whose name is Shiloh, "the Prince of Peace." The secret of domestic peace is to admit Him and "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." All blessings enter when he stands in the doorway saying, "Peace be within this house!" No storm beating on the roof, no shadow—not even death's shadow—falling across the threshold can disturb the sweet tranquillity of a true Christian home. The name of the Lord Jesus is a magical safeguard against the sting of poverty and the chill of sorrow, a bar against all weird and uncanny shapes that stand waiting at the door. In the time of trouble he shall hide thee in the secret of his pavilion. Happiness shall linger though the cruse of oil and the barrel of meal are gone. If the Ark of the Lord be under thy roof, the blessings of Obed-Edom shall be with thee, and thy home shall be a resting-place in the midst of the world's hurrying life—like the moving tent of Abraham as he journeyed towards the Land of Promise,

"A little spot inclosed by grace
Out of the world's vast wilderness."

If this ideal is to be fully realized it must be by cordial coöperation. The various members of the household from father down, as Paul teaches, must all contribute towards it.

(1) The father, as head of the family, must be a just and devout man. He is the house-band. To such the apostle says, "Love your wives," and again, "Provoke not your children, lest they be discouraged." How often churlish Nabal, returning from office or workshop tired and worried and petulant, wearies the soul of poor, patient Abigail and her children and drives out peace and comfort like frightened birds. "As coals are to burning coals

and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife" (Prov. 26:21). Of all persons on earth the father of a household has most occasion to "study to be quiet" and show forth the spirit which suffereth long and is kind. As head of the household it devolves on him to lead the way in illustrating those domestic graces of which Hannah More wrote :

"The angry word suppressed, the taunting thought,
Subduing and subdued the petty strife
Which clouds the color of domestic life,
The sober comfort, all the peace which springs
From the large aggregate of little things—
On these small cares of daughter, wife, or friend
The almost sacred joys of home depend."

(2) And of the wife and mother what shall be said? Her throne is in the home-life. To her the apostle's first word was, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as it is fit in the Lord," not surely with any thought of natural inferiority but with particular reference to that law of social order which everywhere prevents the clash of authority by making one supreme. It has been observed that the social and domestic life of the first century was transformed by the placing of the married pair upon the same relations towards each other as Christ and his church. (Eph. 5 : 22-25).* It is difficult to see how any good and

* "You see the rule of obedience? Well, hear also the rule of love. Do you wish your wife to obey you as the church obeys Christ? Then take care for her as Christ did for the church ; and even if you must give your life for her, or be cut in a thousand pieces, or whatever you must undergo and suffer, shrink not from it ; and even if you suffer all this, you have not yet done anything that Christ did ; for you do this being already joined in marriage to her, but he suffered for a bride who hated and rejected him."—CHRYSOSTOM.

true Christian woman can covet a sweeter or more honorable position than that which finds its best similitude in the relation of the Church to the heavenly Bridegroom. "I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me; he hath brought me unto the banqueting house, and his banner over me is love" (Solomon's Song 2:1-4). In all the world there is no picture more beautiful than that of an aged husband and wife on their way with clasped hands to the kingdom of God.

"John Anderson, my jo, John,
We've clamb the hill thegither,
And mony a canty day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither;
Now we maun totter down, John;
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my jo."

The woman who is both wife and mother is sovereign of two realms. Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her face, though wrinkled and framed in gray, is to them the sweetest and most lovable thing that ever returns through the glamour of the past. The memory of her words is an anchor that holds them fast to truth and duty; and the light of love from her dear eyes illuminates the road to heaven. An irreligious mother loses the most glorious and delightful opportunity that God has ever accorded to a human soul. A Christian mother writes her own virtues in indelible characters on coming generations. The kings and statesmen of our time are but materializing the dreams and visions of the good women of long ago.

(3) The injunction of Paul to the children is comprehended in one word—*obedience*. "Obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." The

Lord himself was an obedient child. It is written that he was "subject unto his parents" (Luke 2:51). It is much to be feared that in our time too little emphasis is put upon this duty. A simple, unquestioning, unhesitating deference to parental authority is one of the characteristic marks of the ideal Christian home. The promise of long life is affixed to it; and what more or better could be said of it, by way of commendation, than that it "is well-pleasing unto the Lord"? For to please him is the supreme end and purpose of every noble life.

(4) Nor can the apostle dismiss his theme without a word of kindly admonition to servants. "Obey your masters," he says, "not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God." The home is affected as really by ill-doing in the kitchen as in the drawing-room. If peace is to be an abiding presence, godliness must reign from end to end of the house. From the head of the household to the scullery maid a due regard must be paid to the precepts of an upright life.

And hear now the summary: "For ye serve the Lord Christ." This is the conclusion of the whole matter. Parents, children, servants, ye are all under him. Let, therefore, the mind that was in Christ Jesus be also in you. Then will the blessing of Obed-Edom the Gittite be yours, of whom it is written, "The Lord blessed him and his household and all that pertained unto him because of the Ark of the Lord." Then will your house yield somewhat of the joy that shall be ours for ever in the Father's house.

GRATEFUL OBEDIENCE.

JAMES I: 16-27.

SOME one had been saying that God is the author of sin and misery. There are people of our acquaintance in these times who hold the same opinion. We are told that Satan in his first estate was an angel of light dwelling in the celestial glory and subject to no adverse influences; for love and goodness filled the immeasurable realms of space. Nevertheless he fell. How? Out of nothing nothing comes. Must there not have been something or some one back of his fall? We also are tempted. Trials greater than we can bear are laid upon us. Our principles are put to a strain under which they bend and oftentimes give way. We have sorrows that harden us. How many in the darkness are provoked, like Job's wife, to curse God! Does our affliction come forth of the dust, or does our trouble spring out of the ground? If not, whence is it? And if God be not its author, why does he not prevent it? Thus the Gordian knot of providence is tied so tight that apparently there is nothing to do but to cut it; and in the flash of the knife we read, "God is the author of sin."

Some one had been reasoning on this wise, had been discussing the matter with other Christians, and the apostle James overheard it. Hence this tender but effective rebuke: Do not err, my beloved brethren; it is the good things and not the evil that come from God. Curb your speech, lest ye be found vamping against the Omniscient. Lay apart all superfluity of self-will and receive his Word. For truth is not evolved from within, but revealed from

on high. Therefore receive ye with meekness the engrafted word. And be ye not hearers only, but doers of it. For religion is not a matter of the lips; *it is life and character.*

In taking apart this admonition we discover three injunctions which are well worth remembering for the help which they furnish in theological controversy as well as in the possibly more practical affairs of life.

First, be slow to speak. It is little enough that the wisest can know of the divine dealings. "God" is a little word; a breath utters it; but all the impenetrable heights and unfathomable depths of truth are contained in it. Canst thou by searching find him out? We mark the tokens of his presence in nature, but even as we lift our eyes the horizons recede and are lost in far-away haze. We grope after him, and hearing the rustle of his garments, we reach out our hands, but lo, he is not there! It is his glory to conceal a matter. A work wrought by human hands can be torn asunder and analyzed; but God's work defies the microscope. The fleck on a butterfly's wing is as wonderful as the map of the heavens; the primordial germ is as incomprehensible as the sum total of the material universe. Everything of God's baffles us. And why not? He is the Infinite; we are finite. Bridge that chasm and then presume to speak. Until then the simplest of divine truths has in it the impenetrableness of the Sphinx's gaze. Who art thou that repliest against God? It is a cheap human trick to cut the knot of existing evil by making God the author of it. Go to his oracles and hearken; when they advise thee, "be swift to hear;" when they are silent, "be slow to speak;" and always and everywhere be slow to utter forth thy resentment against the infinite, eternal, and un-

changeable One. For surely thy wrath can never make thee righteous before him.

And whatsoever thou thinkest, he is ever good. Every blessing cometh from him as the Father of lights. The gifts of providence are from his open and bountiful hand. As a Christian thou art put to an open shame in attributing evil to him; "for of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." Goodness on goodness hath he lavished upon us. God forbid then that we should be found replying against him.

The second of the apostle's injunctions is this, "*Receive the word with meekness*"—the word which is mighty unto salvation when engrafted on or implanted in your souls. A meek acceptance of the Scriptures would make all heresies impossible. In one place the Saviour said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth;" but in many places he has said, "Blessed are the meek, for they apprehend the truth as God reveals it."

Too often we approach the oracles as those who, having opinions and prejudices, would fain confirm them. So we read into the inspired pages a multitude of things which were never inscribed there. The meek man's method is exegesis; the self-opinionated man's is *eisege-sis*—he thrusts his own opinions into the Word of God. By this latter we can make the Scriptures mean what we please. The wish is father of the thought. If a man be full of wisdom, when he comes to his Bible there is nothing that his Bible can teach him. The Omniscient has no revelation for the self-sufficient. All things are for him who empties himself and comes meekly to inquire of God.

A true believer has no opinions which are at variance with the Scriptures. They are his court of last appeal.

They do not "contain" truth; they *are* truth. They do not "contain" the word of God; they *are* through and through the word of God. He has accepted them in all frankness as his only and infallible rule of faith and practice. They furnish his creed and code of morals. Any opinion of his which contravenes them must go by the board. The God in whom he believes is not a figment of his imagination, but the God outlined in Holy Writ. His views of doctrine—such as the Incarnation, the Atonement, and Retributive Justice—are not *a priori* coinings of his own, but truths from the treasury of Inspiration marked with the image and superscription of the King. He may think and investigate to the uttermost, but his final test of truth is always, "Thus saith the Lord." He receives that *dictum* with meekness. The Scriptures are Yea and Amen to him.

The third injunction is, "*Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only.*" The faith which is gotten by listening at the oracles proves its authenticity and sincerity by its resultant walk and conversation. A Jewish proverb runs thus: "He who hears the law and does not practise it is like the man who ploughs and sows but never reaps." A stronger figure still is that of the apostle: "He is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." No man ever yet looked into this Scriptural looking-glass without seeing a sinner there. There is no difference in the reflection, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But there is a great difference in the outcome. Some look, are temporarily impressed, turn their eyes away, and blot out with the vision the remembrance of it. Others look, are appalled, fall upon their knees,

and resolve on amendment. To the former the Scriptures are a savor of death unto death ; to the latter of life unto life.

A tradeswoman once heard a sermon on the use of dishonest weights and measures. Soon after the minister, in making the rounds of his parish, called upon her, and in the course of conversation asked her, as was his custom, what she remembered of his sermon. She knit her brows and taxed her wits in vain. Complaining much of her failing memory, she added, " But, sir, one thing I remembered—I remembered to burn my bushel." And in this she proved herself not a forgetful hearer of the word but a doer of it.

This is the touchstone of sincerity. Faith, if it abide alone, is dead. A creed on parchment is of itself as valueless as a certificate of stock in King Solomon's mines. Nor is mere profession enough. The largest trumpets are poorest for articulation. Not every one that saith unto me, " Lord ! Lord !" shall enter into the kingdom. Preachers may be castaways. Hypocrites make loudest confessions and longest prayers. " If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain."

At this point, by way of conclusion, the apostle gives the best of all definitions of religion. " Pure religion," he says, " and undefiled before God and the Father "—not as men in their un wisdom conceive it, but before the discerning eyes of the omniscient One—" is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

This definition of religion will bear analysis. *On one side* it is " to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." In this instance a single form of benevolence is

used to typify the whole range of beneficent duties which outwardly characterize the Christian life. In general terms, religion is to do good. This is as the world sees it. The poor and needy, the suffering and helpless, are all around us. Everybody is bearing his burden. Nobody is quite happy. There is a sense in which "the fatherless and widows" mean all the children of men. Wherefore the man who is truly religious, having gotten his creed from the Scriptures, will show it forth in doing good unto all men as he hath opportunity. This is the Golden Rule. This is the other half of the love of God.

The Bloody Way was traversed by many pietists, and the wounds of the waylaid traveller, like open mouths, passed judgment on them all. The priest walked by, looked, lamented, and hastened on, and the wounds cried, "That man's religion is vain!" The Levite came and gazed sorrowfully; but hearing afar the trumpet-call to prayer, he could not tarry, and the wounds cried, "That man's religion is vain!" Then the Samaritan came and saw and pitied and poured oil and wine into the sufferer's wounds, but not until they had cried, "This man is blessed in his deed!"

By all the mercies of God—the Father of lights, who so far from being the author of evil, is a benefactor "without variableness," and who, brighter and more benignant than the sun, casts "no shadow by his turning"—by the mercies of God who hath chosen us as a sort of first-fruits among his creatures to praise him like the sheaves that were waved at the altar—by the mercies of the unchangeable God of goodness, let us show our gratitude by dispensing kindness among all the suffering sons and daughters of men.

But religion has *another side*. Its outward form is benevolence, but its true inwardness is purity from sin. If to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" were the sole requirement, then heart and conscience might have little or nothing to do. In this case religion is only skin-deep; any charlatan may imitate it. But it is also—over and under and within all—"to keep himself unspotted from the world;" and here the counterfeiter is ruled out. We may deceive one another with a show of goodness, but God knows whether the soul is clean or not. All things are naked and open before him. He knoweth the secret imagination of the heart of a man.

None can "keep himself unspotted" until his spots of moral defilement have first been washed off. A resolution for the future cannot atone for the past. As well might a leper say, "I will never expose myself to leprosy again: why should I remain among the outcasts? I will veil my face and enter the city." His scales would still be upon him. Let the sinner be cleansed first. How?

"There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains."

Then good resolutions are in order. Being cleansed, let him keep clean, for without holiness no man shall see God. If we are disciples of Christ, washed in his blood, we must not be conformed to the world. We must hate sin and avoid the appearance of it. Spotlessness is the requirement. Do our best and we still fall short of it. What then? "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous." A cry for help and he is beside us; a prayer for

pardon and his hands are lifted in blessing over us, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee!"

O beloved, let us stand by the fountain! There is safety nowhere else. Here is the beginning and end of religion, after all. "His blood flowed most freely in streams of salvation." At his cross we get our creed and our moral code, and in converse with him we get our inspiration to labor of love and patience of hope. Closer to him, then, all ye who covet the religion pure and undefiled—closer to him in faith and conduct here, that in the endless hereafter ye may dwell in the light of his countenance. For Christ is all. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning of noble purpose, the end of holy aspiration—first, last, midst, and all in all.

THE HEAVENLY INHERITANCE.

I PETER I:1-12.

"HE blesseth God for his manifold spiritual graces," so runs the title of Peter's exordium. If ever a man had occasion to bless God, it was Peter. A son of the sea, born in the tempest and bred among fishermen, bold, headstrong, probably not above swearing when emphasis was wanting—large-hearted and open-handed—just the stuff that great rogues and great apostles both are made of—it was a great day when the Master found him at his nets and said, "Follow me." He lifted his eyes and saw in the light of the Face bending over him the possibility of a new and better life. And he arose and left all—nets, boats, comrades, bracing winds of Gennesaret, bickering in the fish-markets, sordid fret and worry, bread-and-butter work—"he left all and followed Him." It was as when the perambulating adventurer of Genoa sailed out between the pillars of Hercules in search of an indefinite somewhere—a land at the worst beyond beggary, with gold at its heart and harvests on its bosom—a land for dreamers and visionaries who were weary of the crowded thoroughfares—call it India, Eldorado, or San Salvador, it matters not—the Land of Desire, the place of an inheritance! Thus Peter, when he lifted his eyes, set forth. How the horizons broadened as he sailed! Blessings, graces, "manifold graces," were his. Not a day passed that did not open up new wonders of the heavenly grace. And as he sailed he sang, "For the Lord is good, his mercy endureth for ever!" until one day—just when and where we know not—the lictors paused, the nails were driven, the

death-cry was uttered, and Peter had found his new world, the Land of the Inheritance.

He wrote this "first Epistle general" at about the time when Nero unsheathed his sword against the followers of Christ. His purpose was to encourage these Christians scattered abroad to be brave and steadfast amid the multiplying dangers of persecution. To this end, in pursuance of his own experience in the heavenly mercy, he quickens their apprehension of the glorious truths of the gospel, and reminds them that beyond life's fitful fever—its brief rest broken with horrid dreams and alarms—lies the Land of the Inheritance. What words are these, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away!"

In the course of his exhortation the apostle sets forth, in words that glow with enthusiastic fervor, some of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel which are calculated to strengthen and enhearten, under the most adverse circumstances, such as believe in Christ. To these let us direct our thought.

First, Election. He reminds the Christians of the dispersion that they are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

The fact that this doctrine is enveloped in mystery must not affect our docile acceptance of it as a fact of revelation, nor prevent us as believers from finding comfort in it. The sweetest honey is that which is gathered from the crevice of the rock.

(1) The redeemed are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God." There is a difference of opinion be-

tween Calvinists and Arminians as to whether or no the election was based on God's foreknowledge that certain ones would comply with the conditions of the covenant of Grace; but both parties to the controversy will agree that election was "according to" foreknowledge. The divine prescience, whether antecedent to the decree or not, could by no possibility have been subsequent to it. Indeed, in one aspect, the question seems wholly trivial, for the suggestion of a chronological sequence in the eternal thoughts and dealings of One with whom a thousand years are as a single day is due wholly to the poverty of the finite mind. It is enough to say with Paul, "Whom God foreknew he also did predestinate; moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Any attempt to analyze the mental processes of the infinite and omniscient God must necessarily be futile. We cannot say "before" and "after" of the things which He wrought before the beginning of time. The goings forth which were from eternity cannot be made to keep step with our procession of days.

(2) It is added that the election of saints is "through sanctification of the Spirit." No unholy man can claim election; for personal purity is the proof of it. Not good works or morality of our own fabrication, but that righteousness which is wrought by the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification. Thus the apostle Paul says to the Thessalonians, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification" (2 Thess. 2:13). We are not, therefore, saved without works; but the works of salvation are such as are wrought not by ourselves, but by the Holy Ghost abiding in us. Our characters are not self-made, but the product of divine workmanship; as

it is written, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-restraint" (Gal. 5:22). These are the graces that constitute character. It is of such that the Lord said, "Ye cannot bear fruit of yourselves" (John 15:4).

(3) Still further. The saints are "elect unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." The popular antipathy to the doctrine of election lies largely in the misconception that God has, for reasons known to himself alone, selected a favored company to receive passports into heaven. This however is not the immediate purpose of God; the elect are chosen to be obedient and holy, to lean hard on Christ and keep the precepts of the Decalogue and the Golden Rule. This is the calling and election of every follower of Christ. And following out that election, he must patiently continue in well-doing, must live on the margin of the "fountain that is filled with blood" and neglect no opportunity of helping others and so glorifying God.

The second doctrine to which Peter refers by way of encouragement is Regeneration. "Blessed be God," he exclaims, "who hath begotten us again!" The mystery of election is here reinforced with another not less profound and bewildering. The two go hand in hand; and without the one the other could not be.

This is the word of the Master, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Ye must be born again." Must be! Never a soul has passed into glory without it. The shining seats of heaven are filled with souls that entered without fame or learning or anything else that men count worth the having, but not one without the "new birth." For "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

(1) This new birth is said to be "unto a lively (i. e., living) hope." The soul that has experienced it dwells no longer among the tombs, but looks away, clear-eyed, towards visions so glorious that they evermore quicken the pulse and gladden the life. There are perfunctory pietists who speak of their "hope" as if it were a ticket on a heavenward-bound train—a thing to be carried in the pocket and produced for show on occasion or when called for. But the hope to which God hath re-begotten us is a living, energizing hope, dwelling in the heart like an angel in the secret place of a pavilion—a hope with eyes to glisten, a voice to cheer, hands to uplift, and feet to run on errands of mercy. This is the hope that "maketh not ashamed," but helps and strengthens, like an anchor, sure and steadfast, taking hold of that within the veil.

(2) The assurance of this hope is in "the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The close relation of this miracle with the new birth must not be overlooked. It not only furnishes the type and figure of it—for as Jesus as the firstfruits rose from the dead, so do his people from spiritual darkness into newness of life—it also seals the atonement which makes it possible. "He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification." The work of redemption without this consummating wonder is but a deed of conveyance without a signature. Wherefore it is written, "If Christ be not raised ye are yet in your sins." But because he liveth we shall live also; and because he conquered death and hell we may believe in the reality of that spiritual transformation by which we enter into life and immortality. Augustine wrote, "When I did apprehend this, O Lord, then did I believe that whosoever believeth in thee, though he were

dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in thee shall never die!"

(3) The hope of the Christian, thus fortified, opens to him the rights and privileges of sonship. For we, being re-begotten unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, are, by the same token, re-begotten "unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away." The inheritance is for children only. We are received not by the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but by the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." Blessed truth! Henceforth he calls us not servants but friends; nay more, not friends but sons and daughters. And if children then heirs (Gal. 4:7), heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). And thus it comes about that, in the consummation of our living hope, of right as children and still of grace by adoption, we are "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12).

The third doctrine on which Peter dwells in this exhortation to the persecuted saints is *Perseverance*. The inheritance, he says, is for such as are "kept by the power of God." Here again there is a difference of opinion between Calvinists and Arminians; the former saying, "Once a Christian, always a Christian," the latter holding to the possibility of falling from grace. Yet both believe in *Perseverance*; the former as a fact, the latter as a duty. God grant that, whatever we may believe as to the method or certainty of the keeping, we may all be kept by the power of God.

(1) By the power of God. For otherwise we shall surely fall and perish by the way. Of our own selves we can do nothing. One of the early Saxon believers is said to have taken for his crest a wine-glass with a broken foot

and over it the prayer, "Hold thou me up." For a man to trust to his own strength is as if he were to seek shelter in his own shadow in a hot day. "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be confounded." Whether there be any possibility of losing the living hope or not, certain it is that no man ever lost it while trusting in God. For

(2) We are kept "through faith." Faith is the hand that holds God's hand. To let go is to fall away from him. It is comforting to know, however, that while our faith grips hold of him his power also grips hold of us. Therefore if we fall it must be by a double letting go. We walk amid innumerable foes and dangers; there are lions in the path, robbers in the clefts of the rocks, and arrows flying through the air. If we are wise we shall cling close to our great Guide and Helper, like little children led by their parents through a night peopled with grim shadows. Faith clings fast; faith crowds close; faith keeps step; faith heeds every word of admonition; faith looks up with trustful eyes. We are kept through faith, "kept

(3) Unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." This is the glorious end of our faith. But what is salvation? Not a mere deliverance from the fire and brimstone pains of endless retribution: that is the very lowest and most meagre conception of it. Salvation is a large word, embracing all the joys of Christian living here and hereafter, all the delights of service in the church militant and, by promotion, in the church triumphant. All things in earth and heaven that an immortal soul should covet are rolled together in it. As yet we catch but glimpses of salvation. Our sweetest moments yield but foretastes of it. "The milk and honey," as Bunyan said, "are beyond the wilderness." There are great sur-

prises in store for us. Our salvation is not revealed as yet, but is "ready to be revealed in the last time."

These are the encouragements with which Peter, in his exordium, seeks to enhearten the persecuted and suffering saints. In truths like these, foregleams of hope and earnestness of salvation, "ye do greatly rejoice," he says, "though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold trials."

And there is a "needs be." The flower yields not its perfume save by bruising. The quartz must be crushed or its gold will never pass current. To the saints of Peter's time the trial was by sword and faggot; to us it comes by beckoning hands or pointed fingers, by sidelong glances or honeyed words, but always the fire is under the crucible; whence our frequent "heaviness." Nevertheless, joy is the appointed portion of our cup. "This is a goodly neckerchief," said Alice Driver, touching the chain upon her neck. "One more stile," said another on his way to Smithfield, "and I shall be at heaven's gate." Thus at the worst our afflictions are light and endure but a moment. And brighter than gold of Ophir is the faith that, being tried with fire, is found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile the Son of God is with us in the fiery furnace—ever present, ever helpful—"in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Midnight clouds may hide the stars of heaven; but there is no darkness that can obscure the shining of his face. In six troubles he is with us and in seven no evil shall befall us.

All this by the way, and when all is over, "the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls"—a mere hint of the great consummation, the surprise that awaits

us when God shall draw the veil and show us salvation ! Vainly have the prophets "inquired and searched diligently concerning it." Vainly do the angels themselves "desire to look into it." To us it is given, as the end of our faith, to know salvation, to enter into it as into a land of inexhaustible treasure, to know what is the length and breadth of it. "It is not for me," wrote Bishop Rust, "nor for any mortal creature, to make a map of the Canaan above. It may be that some heavenly pilgrim, who with holy thoughts is continually travelling thitherward, arrives sometimes near the borders of the promised land and gets upon the top of Pisgah where he has prospect of a fair country that lieth a great way off; but he cannot tell how to describe it. All that he hath to say to the curious inquirer is this, 'If thou wouldst know the glories of it, go and see.'"

Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

THE GLORIFIED SAVIOUR.

REV. I:9-20.

THE key to the book of the Revelation is *Maranatha*, "The Lord Cometh!" It is the Book of the Coming of Christ.

The world was even in John's time groaning for "the restitution of all things." Nero was on the throne. His gardens were lit with living torches. The blood of the Christians was flowing like water. Ax, faggot, cross, whip of scorpions, teeth of lions—the fiendish ingenuity of the inquisitor was exhausted in devising new and more terrific modes of suffering and death.

Meanwhile John was in Patmos, an exile for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Sole survivor of the Twelve, bearing the burden of seven decades of years, he sat upon that lonely outlook in the Ægean and imagined that he saw afar the flames of Nero's holocausts and heard faint voices as of men and women amid the flames committing their souls to God. And he—oldest and worthiest brother of James that perished by the sword—had no lot or part in this matter. They were dying and he lived; they were ascending in bright chariots, and he as helpless as a child upon a bed of languishing. Was he not worthy? In his dim eyes—son of thunder that he was—the old light must have kindled ever and anon like fire from dying embers. But God has need of dreamers as well as confessors. In vain John bares his breast towards heaven as if devoting it to sword and javelin for the testimony of Jesus. He must bide in his place. God will open the heavens unto him in another way: he shall dream

dreams and see visions. In his sight the Holy One shall walk amid the golden candlesticks and shall convey through him the message to the universal church. The seven seals of the Book of Destiny shall be broken and the seven vials of wrath poured out before him. The Lord shall go forth clad in a blood-stained garment, followed by squadrons in white apparel, to meet the dragon. Then great Armageddon! The heavens shall ring with battle-cries and roar of artillery. The hosts of darkness shall be turned in flight and their leader hurled headlong into the abyss amid exultant shouts, "Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen!" Then the return, the welcome, the marriage-supper, hosannas and hallelujahs, "For Thou art worthy to receive honor and glory and dominion and power for ever and ever!" All this shall John behold, and his vision shall be for the encouragement of God's people until the coming of the Lord. Though He tarry, let them confidently wait. In fulness of time—when the seals are broken and the vials emptied—the heavens shall part asunder and He shall appear. It is the last word: an old man kneeling on a barren rock, with face uplifted and glorified, eyes dim to earth's scenes, but lit with the splendors beyond, cries *Maranatha!* "Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!" The waves sob and moan about Patmos; the dreamer is gone, but his visions remain. And he seeth evermore face to face and eye to eye.

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." So the story of the visions begins. The day referred to was evidently the first day of the week, which in lieu of the Jewish Sabbath was kept sacred by the early Christians in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. It has ever since been a day of visions, of spiritual exaltation.

Worn out with our six days of toil we come to this Lord's day, like Alpine tourists who, after weary climbing, reach the summit and gaze upon a world far down and away. Here is the healthful mountain, the clear light of heaven, the boundless reach of vision. God be praised for it!

"And I heard a voice, and turning to see who it was that spake with me, I saw seven golden candlesticks." In the twenty-fifth of Exodus, where instruction is given for the building of the tabernacle, you may find the counterpart of this: a golden candlestick with a central stem and three branches on every side, with buds and flowers and almond fruit. It was tree-like in form and was probably intended to symbolize the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Here it typifies the Church, the universal Church, through which God communicates to the world his double gift of spiritual life and light.

"And in the midst of the candlesticks I saw One like unto the Son of Man." The majestic figure here referred to was evidently not the essential God, for God is spirit; he "hath neither body, parts, nor passions," and no man hath therefore ever seen him or can see him. But he has manifested himself in Jesus Christ, who is the express image of the Father, the fulness of the Godhead bodily. In knowing him we make the acquaintance of God.

It is a notable fact that the Scriptures give no description of the personal appearance of Christ. There is one traditional representation of him in the spurious "Letter of Lentulus," as follows: "He is a man of middle stature on whose face the purity and charm of youth are mingled with the thoughtfulness and dignity of manhood. His hair, which has been likened to the color of wine, is parted in the middle of the forehead and flows down over the neck. His features are paler and of a

more Hellenic type than the weather-bronzed and olive-tinted faces of the hardy fishermen who follow him. But though his features have evidently been marred by sorrow; though his eyes, whose pure and indescribable glance seems to read the very secrets of the heart, have often glowed through tears; yet no man whose soul has not been eaten through by sin and selfishness can look unmoved on the divine expression of that calm and patient face." But beautiful as this description is, no reliance whatever can be placed upon it. In the absence of any trustworthy statement as to the appearance of Jesus in the flesh, we turn with pleasure to this glimpse of him walking, glorified, among the golden candlesticks.

"*One like unto the Son of Man.*" The dreamer could scarcely believe that this was the same Jesus whom he had known among the humiliations of His earthly life. He had seen him in the home at Nazareth, at the carpenter's bench with the chips and shavings about his feet, trudging wearily along the thoroughfares, sitting on the curb of Jacob's well anhungered and athirst, dragged by a mob to Pilate's judgment-hall, scourged and spit upon, nailed to the cross, carried to his burial. Could this be the same? Once John had stood on Mt. Tabor and had seen him transfigured for a brief season, his garments white and glistening and his face as the sun shineth in his strength; yet even that was but the faintest foregleam of this vision of transcendent majesty. This is Christ glorified. The particulars of this symbolical portrait are well worthy of our closer attention. One day we shall behold it for ourselves—*hisce oculis*—but meanwhile let us try to imagine it.

1. It is written "*He was clothed with a garment down to the foot.*" While he dwelt among men he doubtless

wore, as became his station, the short, seamless tunic of a Galilean peasant; it is to be observed, however, that in this instance he wears a garment which had been set apart from time immemorial as the distinctive vesture of the High-Priest. Here is a vivid reference to the priesthood of Jesus, who having offered himself as a sacrifice, now liveth to make intercession for us.

2. "*And he was girt with a golden girdle.*" Not about the loins, as athletes and laboring men were accustomed to gird themselves for unusual tasks, but around the breast. In Exodus 28:15 we find that this golden band around the breast is identical with the breastplate worn by the High-Priest on festival days. It was surrounded by four rows of precious stones whereon were inscribed the names of the tribes of Israel. At the back it was bound with wreathen work. And it was written, "Thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and Thummim, and Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the Holy Place, for a memorial before the Lord." So does Jesus, the great High-Priest, intercede for his people before the throne of the heavenly grace, having entered into the Most Holy Place within the veil. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous. Our names are written upon the palms of his hands. He ever maketh intercession for us.

3. "*And His hairs were white.*" But not with age. In the vision of Daniel a similar statement is made as to the Ancient of Days: "His garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool." To Him one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Thus also, in one of our familiar hymns:

“Eternity with all its years
 Stands present to thy view ;
 To thee there 's nothing old appears,
 Great God, there 's nothing new.”

His years are æons, his lifetime eternity. Yet the whiteness of his hair indicates none of the decrepitude of age. Kings and potentates grow old, but not this One. Their hairs are silvered as the years pass ; the keepers of the house tremble, and they that look out of the windows are darkened. But Christ, coeval with eternity and Creator of time, grows not old. The whiteness of his locks is the spotless glory of the snows on Hermon. It is the ineffable whiteness of holiness. The stars of heaven are not pure before him.

4. “*And his eyes were as a flame of fire.*” Oh those eyes ! The eyes of the Lord ! Who shall ever escape them ? For behold they run to and fro through the earth beholding the evil and the good. There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight, for all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. This must needs be since he is the Judge of all. He can make no mistakes. In his administration there are no miscarriages of justice. He judgeth according to that he seeth, and all his judgments are right.

5. “*And his feet were like unto fine brass ;*” literally, burnished brass. The reference may be to the stability of his government. In the image that appeared in Daniel's dream, symbolizing the great empires of the world, the feet were of clay. The glory of this world passeth away. The path of history is lined with the ruins of thrones and dynasties. But Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion is for ever and ever.

There may also be a reference here to that “swift,

untiring grace" with which our Lord accomplished his ministry on earth. Was there ever a monograph of character so comprehensive as this, "He went about doing good"? Much of his wonderful life was spent in journeying. Oh those blessed, weary feet! weary for us and pierced for us. How beautiful are they upon the mountains, coming to bring salvation and publish peace!

6. "*His voice was as the sound of many waters,*" resounding and powerful. The figure came to John as he sat upon the barren cliffs hearkening to the roar of the Ægean billows. As the sound of the tumultuous ocean is but the mighty harmony of tens of thousands of confluent streams that murmur into it, so is God's voice the commingled sum of all voices in nature, history, and the souls of men. The time will come when our dull ears shall be unstopped and we shall hear it—hear it everywhere and in everything—as dwellers by the sea are always conscious of its deep reverberations. So the Psalmist heard it: "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thundereth. The voice of the Lord is powerful; it divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness, yea, the wilderness of Kadesh. The Lord sitteth upon the flood; he sitteth King for ever."

7. "*In his right hand were seven stars.*" These were set in a signet-ring like a cluster of diamonds. They denote the ministers—here called "angels" or messengers—of the churches. Whereon it may be remarked that while "star preachers" abound, there is no superfluity of such as gleam upon God's signet. To be held in his right hand or worn upon it, to move as he moves us, and minister to his glory alone, this is to be God's true men.

8. "*Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged*

sword." Of many figures used to represent the incisiveness of the divine Word none is more striking than this. The sword's double edge is typical of its two-fold power to convert or to destroy. For the Word is to some a savor of life unto life, but to others of death unto death. It is indeed quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Let it be observed that the sword which Christ has used in spiritual conquest is no veritable weapon of steel, but the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

"Armies thou hast in heaven which fight
And follow thee, all clothed in white ;
But here on earth, though thou hadst need,
Thou wouldst no legions, but wouldst bleed.
The sword with which thou dost command
Is in thy mouth, not in thy hand."

9. "*And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*" How hard it is to look on the sun at noonday when he shineth in his strength ! So dazzling is the light of Christ's countenance. He dwelleth in light and glory unapproachable. In the year that king Uzziah died the prophet Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up." Nay, he could scarcely be said to have seen the King ; he did indeed catch a glimpse of the outlines of a throne, and heard the rustle of wings and voices calling one to another, "Holy ! holy ! holy !" and saw something which he called glory filling the temple. And by this he was so appalled that he cried, "Woe is me, for I am undone : because I am a man of unclean lips and mine eyes have seen the King !" In like manner John "fell upon his face as dead."

10. And then it is written, "*He laid his right hand upon me and said, Fear not!*" If John had been really in doubt as to the identity of the One who walked amid the candlesticks, this voice must have reassured him. He had heard it at the transfiguration, in the upper chamber, amid the storms of Gennesaret. And those words "Fear not!" how familiar they were! And the kindly touch of that right hand! Ah now he knew him! This was indeed his friend, Jesus, the Son of Man! *I am he that liveth and was dead and am alive for evermore.*" Vanish the memory of a dead Christ prepared for his burial! He liveth! The keys of death and hell are at his girdle. And because he liveth we shall live also; and because he hath triumphed we also shall triumph over death and hell. And we shall sit down together with him in his throne.

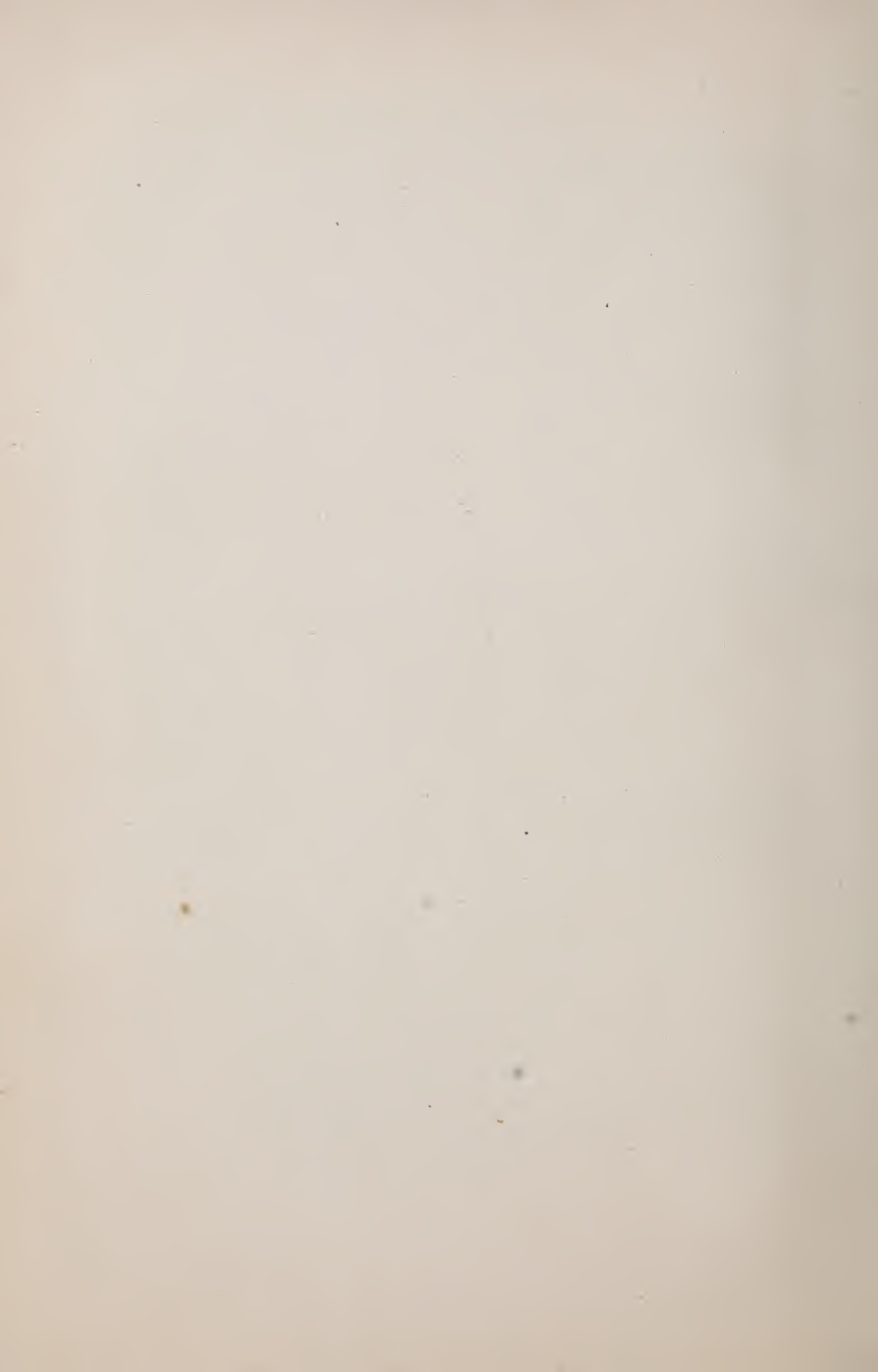
"For ever with the Lord:

Amen, so let it be.

Life from the dead is in that word,

'T is immortality."

There are many souls in Patmos exiled from home and kindred, from joy of service and fellowship in great endeavor. They hear the voice that thundereth and see visions that dazzle and bewilder them. They tremble and are afraid. Speak to them O Priest above, that canst be touched with a feeling of our infirmities! Say to them, "Fear not!" Tell them thou livest and carest for them. Lay thy right hand upon them—the hand that knoweth all the gentleness of a mother's touch. Let them behold at thy girdle other keys than those of death and hell, and with them open thou the gates of heavenly rest, that they, clothed in thy white holiness, may boldly and worthily enter in!



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